LA MERE TONSARD

Balzac, vol. twenty—Frontis

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HONORÉ DE BALZAC

IN TWENTY-FIVE VOLUMES

The First Complete Translation into English

THE PEASANTRY
THE COUNTRY PARSON

Volume Twenty

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS FROM DRAWINGS ON THE WOOD
BY FAMOUS FRENCH ARTISTS

New York
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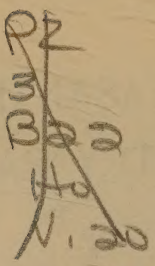

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THE PEASANTRY

PREFACE

FEW, I suppose, of the readers of "Les Paysans" in more recent years have read it without a more or less distinct mental comparison with the corresponding book in the Rougon-Macquart series. And I should hope that this comparative process has had, in the best minds, only one result. "Les Paysans" (which, by the way, is a very late book, partly posthumous, and is said, though not on positive authority, to have enjoyed the collaboration of Madame de Balzac) is not one of Balzac's best; but it is as far above "La Terre" from every conceivable point of view, except that of Holywell Street, as a play of Shakespeare is above one of Monk Lewis.

The comparison, indeed, exhibits something more than the difference of genius in Balzac and in M. Zola. It illustrates the difference of their methods. We know how not merely the Rougon-Macquart series in general, but "La Terre" in particular, was composed. M. Zola, who is a conscientious man, went down to a village (somewhere in the Beauce, if I recollect rightly), stayed some time, made his notes, and came back to Paris. There is nothing like the same great gulf fixed between the Londoner and the countryman in England as that which exists between the Parisian and the Provincial in France. But imagine an Englishman, not even English by race, from his youth up an inhabitant of great towns, attempting to delineate the English peasantry after a few weeks' stay in a Wiltshire village!

Balzac, on the other hand, a Frenchman of Frenchmen,

was born in a French country town, was brought up in the country, and, what is more, was in the constant habit of retiring to out-of-the-way country inns and similar places to work. He had the key, to begin with; and he never let it get rusty. To some tastes and judgments his country sketches, if less lively, are more veracious even than his Parisian ones; they have less convention about them; they are less obviously under the dominion of prepossessions and crotchets, less elaborately calculated to form backgrounds and scenery for the evolutions of Rastignacs and Rubemprés.

The result is, in "Les Paysans," a book of extraordinary interest and value. In one respect, indeed, it falls short of the highest kind of novel. There is no character in whose fortunes or in whose development we take the keenest interest. Blondet is little more than an intelligent chorus or reporter, though he does not tell the story; Montcornet is a good-natured "old silly"; the Countess is—a Countess. Not one of the minor characters, not even Rigou, is very much more than a sketch. But then there is such a multitude of these sketches, and they are all instinct with such life and vigor! Although Balzac has used no illegitimate attractions—think only of the kind of stuff with which M. Zola, like a child smearing color on a book-engraving, would have daubed the grisly outlines of the Tonsard family!—he has not shrunk from what even our modern realists, I suppose, would allow to be "candor"; and his book is as masterly as it is crushing in its indictment against the peasant.

Is the indictment as true as it is severe and well urged? I am rather afraid that we have not much further to look than at certain parts of more than one of the Three Kingdoms to see that we need not even limit ourselves to the French peasant in admitting that it is. There are passages in the book which read as if they might be extracts *mutatis mutandis* from a novel on the Irish Land League or the Welsh Anti-Tithe Agitation. To a certain extent, no doubt, the English peasant, at least when he is not Celtic, is rather less

bitten with actual "land-hunger" than the Frenchman; and even when he is a Celt, it does not seem to be so much land-hunger proper as a dislike to adopting any other occupation which drives him to crime. Moreover, Free Trade and other things have made land in the United Kingdom very much less an object of positive greed than it was in France eighty years ago, or, indeed, than it is there still. Yet the main and special ingredients of a land agitation—the ruthless disregard of life, the indifference to all considerations of gratitude or justice, the secret-society alliance against the upper classes—all these things are delineated here with an almost terrifying veracity.

For individual and separate sketches of scenes and characters (with the limitation above expressed) the book may vie almost with the best. The partly real, partly fictitious, otter-hunting of the old scoundrel Fourchon is quite first-rate; and it is of a kind rarely found in French writers till a time much more modern than Balzac's. The machinations of Gaubertin, Sibilet, and Rigou are a little less vivid; but the latter is a masterly character of the second class, and perhaps the best type in fiction of the intelligent sensualist of the lower rank—of the man hard-headed, harder-hearted, and entirely destitute of any merit but shrewdness. The character of Bonnebault is a little, a very little, theatrical; the *troupier français* debauched, but not ungenerous, appears a little too much in his cartoon manner. La Péchina wants fuller working out; but she affords one of the most interesting touches of the comparison above suggested in the scene between her, Nicolas, and Catherine. One turns a little squeamish at the mere thought of what M. Zola would have made of it in the effort to make clear to the lowest apprehension what Balzac, almost without offence, has made clear to all but the very lowest. Michal is good and not overdone; and of his enemies the Tonsards—enough has been said. They could not be better in their effectiveness; and, I am afraid, they could not be much better in their truth. Here, at least, if the moral picture is grimy enough, Balzac cannot,

I think, be charged with having exaggerated it, while he cannot be denied the credit of having presented it in extraordinarily forcible and brilliant colors and outlines.

"Les Paysans," owing to the lateness of its appearance, was less pulled about than almost any other of its author's books. It, or rather the first part of it, appeared under the title "Qui Terre a guerre a" in the "Presse" for December, 1844. Nothing more appeared during the author's life; but in 1855 the "Revue de Paris" reprinted the previous portion, and finished the book, and the whole was published in four volumes by de Potter in the same year.

TO M. P.-S.-B. GAVAULT

"I HAVE SEEN the manners of my time, and I publish these letters," wrote Jean Jacques Rousseau at the beginning of his "Nouvelle Héloise"; can I not imitate that great writer and tell you that "I am studying the tendencies of my epoch, and I publish this work"?

So long as society inclines to exalt philanthropy into a principle instead of regarding it as an accessory, this Study will be terribly true to life. Its object is to set in relief the principal types of a class neglected by the throng of writers in quest of new subjects. This neglect, it may be, is simple prudence in days when the working classes have fallen heirs to the courtiers and flatterers of kings, when the criminal is the hero of romance, the headsman is sentimentally interesting, and we behold something like an apotheosis of the proletariat. Sects have arisen among us, every pen among them swells the chorus of "Workers, arise!" even as once the Third Estate was bidden to "Arise!" It is pretty plain that no Herostratus among them has had the courage to go forth into remote country districts to study the phenomena of a permanent conspiracy of those whom we call "the weak" against those who imagine themselves to be "the strong"—of the Peasantry against the Rich. All that can be done is to open the eyes of the legislator, not of to-day, but of to-morrow. In the midst of an attack of democratic vertigo to which so many blind scribes have fallen victims, is it not imperatively necessary that some one should paint the portrait of this Peasant who stultifies the Code by reducing the ownership of land to a something that at once is and is not? Here you shall see this indefatigable sapper at his work, nibbling and gnawing the land into little bits, carving an acre into a hundred

scraps, to be in turn divided, summoned to the banquet by the bourgeois, who finds in him a victim and ally. Here is a social dissolvent, created by the Revolution, that will end by swallowing up the bourgeoisie, which in its day devoured the old noblesse. Here is a Robespierre, with a single head and twenty million hands, whose very insignificance and obscurity has put him out of the reach of the law; a Robespierre always at his work, crouching in every commune, enthroned in town council chambers and bearing arms in the National Guard in every district in France, for in the year 1830 France forgot that Napoleon preferred to run the risks of his misfortunes to the alternative of arming the masses.

If during the past eight years I have a hundred times taken up and laid down the most considerable piece of work which I have undertaken; my friends, as you yourself, will understand that courage may well falter before such difficulties, and the mass of details essential to the development of a drama so cruelly bloodthirsty, but among the many reasons which induce something like temerity in me, count as one my desire to complete a work destined as a token of deep and lasting gratitude for a devotion which was one of my greatest consolations in misfortune.

DE BALZAC.

THE PEASANTRY

BOOK ONE

He that hath the Land
Must fight for his own Hand

I

THE CHATEAU

To M. Nathan

"THE AIGUES, *August* 6, 1823

NOW, MY DEAR NATHAN, purveyor of dreams to the public, I will set you dreaming of the actual, and you shall tell me if ever this century of ours can leave a legacy of such dreams to the Nathans and the Blondets of 1923. You shall measure the distance we have travelled since the time when the Florines of the eighteenth century awoke to find such a château as the Aigues in their contract.

"When you get my letter in the morning, dear friend of mine, from your bed will you see, fifty leagues away from Paris, by the side of the highroad on the confines of Burgundy, a pair of red brick lodges separated or united by a green-painted barrier? There the coach deposited your friend.

"A quick-set hedge winds away on either side of the lodge gates; with trails of bramble like stray hairs escaping from it, and here and there an upstart sapling. Wild flowers grow along the top of the bank above the ditch bathed at their roots by the stagnant green water. To right and left the hedges extend as far as the coppice which skirts a double meadow, a bit of cleared forest no doubt.

"From the dusty deserted lodges at the gates there stretches a magnificent avenue of elm-trees a century old; the spreading tops meet in a majestic green arched roof overhead, and the road below is so overgrown with grass that you can scarcely see the ruts. The old-world look of the gate, the venerable elm-trees, the breadth of the alleys on either side which cross the avenue, prepare you to expect an almost royal château. Before reaching the lodge I had had a look at the valley of the Aigues from the top of one of the slopes which we in France have the vanity to call a hill, just above the village of Conches, where we changed horses for the last stage. At the end the highroad makes a detour to pass through the little sub-prefecture of Ville-aux-Fayes, where a nephew of our friend Lupeaulx lords it over the rural population. The higher slopes of the broad ridges above the rivér are crowned by the forest which stretches along the horizon line, and the whole picture is framed in the setting of the far-off hills of the Morvan—that miniature Switzerland. All this dense forest lies in three hands. It belongs partly to the Aigues, partly to the Marquis de Ronquerolles, partly to the Comte de Soulanges, whose country houses, parks, and villages, seen far down below in the valley, seem to be a realization of 'Velvet' Breughel landscape fancies.

"If these details do not put you in mind of all the castles in Spain which you have longed to possess in France, this wonder-struck Parisian's traveller's tale is clean thrown away upon you. Briefly, I have delighted in a country where nature and art blend without spoiling each other, for nature here is an artist, and art looks like nature. I have found the oasis of which we have dreamed so often after reading certain romances; exuberant wildness subordinated to an effect, nature left to herself without confusion, and even with a suggestion of the wilderness, neglect, mystery; a certain character of its own. Over the barrier with you, and on we go.

"When with curious eyes I tried to look down the whole

length of the avenue, which the sun only penetrates at sunrise and sunset, drawing zebra markings of shadow across it when the light is low, my view was cut short by the outline of a bit of rising ground. The avenue makes a detour to avoid it, and when you have turned the corner, the long row of trees is interrupted again by a little wood; you enter a square with a stone obelisk standing erect in the midst like an eternal note of admiration. Purple or yellow flowers (according to the time of year) droop from the courses of the masonry, and the monolith itself is surmounted (what a notion!) by a spiked ball. Clearly it was a woman who designed the Aigues, a man does not have such coquettish fancies. The architect acted upon instructions.

"Beyond the little wood, posted there like a sentinel, I came out into a delicious dip of the and, land crossed a foaming stream by a single span stone bridge covered with mosses of glorious hues, the daintiest of time's mosaics. Then the avenue ascends a gentle slope above the course of the stream, and in the distance you see the first set picture—a mill with its weir and causeway nestled among green trees. There was the thatched roof of the miller's house, the ducks and drying linen, the nets and tackle, and well-boat, to say nothing of the miller's lad, who had been gazing at me before I set eyes on him. Wherever you may be in the country, sure though you feel that you are quite alone, you are the cynosure of some pair of eyes under a cotton night-cap. Some laborer drops his hoe to look at you, some vine-dresser straightens his bent back, some little maid leaves her goats, or cows, or sheep, and scrambles up a willow tree to watch your movements.

"Before long the elm avenue becomes an alley, shaded by acacias, which brings you to a gate belonging to the period when wrought-iron was twisted into aërial filigree work, not unlike a writing-master's specimen flourishes; this Avenue gate, as it is called, reveals the taste of the Grand Dauphin who built it; and if the golden arabesques are somewhat reddened now by the rust beneath, it seemed to me to be

none the less picturesque on that account. On either side it is flanked by a porter's lodge, after the manner of the palace at Versailles, each surmounted by a colossal urn. A ha-ha fence, bristling with spikes most formidable to behold, extends for some distance on either side, and when the ha-ha ends a rough unplastered wall begins, a wall of motley-colored stones of the strangest conceivable shapes, imbedded in reddish-colored mortar, the warm yellow of the flints blending with the white chalk and red-brown gritstone.

"At first sight the park looks sombre, for the walls are hidden by climbing plants, and the trees have not heard the sound of an ax for fifty years. You might think that it had become virgin forest again by some strange miracle known to woods alone. The plants that cling about the tree-trunks have bound them together. Glistening mistletoe-berries hang from every fork in the branches where the rain-water can lie. There I have found giant ivy-stems, and such growths as can only exist at a distance of fifty leagues from Paris, where land is not too dear to afford them ample room. It takes a good many square miles to make such a landscape as this. There is no sort of trimness about it, no sign of the garden rake. The ruts are full of water, where the frogs increase and multiply, and the tadpoles abide in peace; delicate forest flowers grow there, the heather is as fine as any that I have seen by the hearth in January in Florine's elaborate flower-stand. The mystery of the place mounts to your brain and stirs vague longings. The scent of the forest is adored by all lovers of poetry, for all things in it—the most harmless mosses, the deadliest lurking growths, damp earth, water-willows, and balm and wild thyme, and the yellow stars of the water-lilies, all the teeming vigorous growth of the forest yields itself to me in the breath of the forest, and brings me the thought of them all, perhaps the soul of them all. I fell to thinking of a rose-colored dress flitting along the winding alley.

"It ended abruptly at last in a little wood full of tremulous birches and poplars and their quivering kind, sensitive

to the wind, slender-stemmed, graceful of growth, the trees of free love. And then, my dear fellow, I saw a sheet of water covered with pond-lilies, and a light nutshell of a boat, painted black and white, dainty as a Seine waterman's craft, lying rotting among the leaves of the water-plants, broad and spreading, or delicate and fine.

"Beyond the water rises the château, which bears the date 1560. It is a red brick building with stone facings, and string courses and angles all of stone. The casements (oh! Versailles) still keep their tiny square window panes. The stone of the string courses is cut into pyramids alternately raised and depressed, as on the Renaissance front of the Ducal Palace. The château is a straggling building, with the exception of the main body, which is approached by an imposing double stone staircase ascending in parallel lines and turning half-way up at right angles. The round balusters are flattened at the thickest part, and taper toward the bottom. To this main body various turrets have been added, covered with lead in floral designs, and modern wings with balconies and urns more or less in the Grecian style. There is no symmetry about it, my dear fellow. The buildings are dotted down quite promiscuously—nests sheltered, as it were, by a few trees. Their leafage scatters countless brown needles over the roof, a deposit of soil for the moss to grow in, filling the great rifts, which attract the eyes, with plant life. Here there is stone-pine, with rusty red bark and umbrella-shaped top, there a cedar a couple of centuries old, a spruce-fir, or weeping-willows, or an oak-tree, rising above these, and (in front of the principal turret) the most outlandish-looking shrubs, clipped yews to set you thinking of some old French pleasance long since swept away, and hortensias and magnolias at their feet; in fact, it is a sort of horticultural pensioner's hospital, where trees that have had their day linger on, forgotten like other heroes.

"A quaintly carved chimney at the house angle puffing out volumes of smoke, assured me that this charming view was no scene on the stage. If there was a kitchen, human

beings lived there. Can you imagine me, Blondet, the Parisian who thinks he has come to the Arctic regions when he finds himself at Saint-Cloud, set down in the midst of that torrid zone of Burgundian landscape? The sun beats down in scorching rays, the kingfisher keeps to the brink of the pool, the cicadas chirp, the grasshoppers cry, the seed-vessels of some plant crack here and there, the poppies distil their opiate in thick tears, everything stands out sharp and clear against the dark-blue sky. Joyous fumes of Nature's punch mount up from the reddish earth on the garden terraces; insects and flowers are drunk with the vapor that burns our faces and scorches our eyes. The grapes are rounding, the vines wearing a network of pale threads so fine that it puts laceworkers to the blush; and (a final touch) all along the terrace, in front of the house, blaze the blue larkspurs, nasturtiums the color of flame, and sweet-peas. The scent of tuberose and orange blossoms comes from a distance. The forest fragrance which stirred my imagination prepared me for the pungent perfumes burning in this flower-seraglio.

"Then, at the head of the stone staircase, imagine a woman like a queen of flowers, a woman dressed in white, holding a sunshade lined with white silk above her bare head, a woman whiter than the silk, whiter than the lilies at her feet, or the starry jessamine thrusting itself up boldly through the balustrade before her; a Frenchwoman born in Russia, who says, 'I had quite given you up!' She had seen me ever since the turning in the path. How perfectly any woman, even the simplest of her sex, understands and adapts herself to a situation. The servants were busy preparing breakfast, evidently delayed till the diligence should arrive. She had not ventured to come to meet me.

"What is this but our dream? the dream of all lovers of Beauty in its many forms—beauty as of seraphs in a Luini's 'Marriage of the Virgin' at Sarono, beauty that a Rubens discovers in the press of the fight in his 'Battle of Thermodon,' beauty that five centuries have elaborated in the

cathedrals of Milan and Seville, beauty of Saracen Granada, beauty of a Louis Quatorze's Versailles, beauty of the Alps —beauty of La Limagne?

"Here there is nothing overmuch of prince or financier, but prince of the blood and farmer-general have dwelt at the Aigues, or it would not include two thousand acres of woodland, a park nine hundred acres in extent, the mill, three little holdings, a large farm at Conches, and the vineyards belonging to the estate, which must bring in seventy-two thousand francs every year. Such is the Aigues, dear boy, whither I have come on an invitation of two years' standing, and here I write at this moment in the Blue Chamber—the room kept for intimate friends of the house.

"At the high end of the park there are a dozen springs of clear and limpid water from the Morvan, flowing in liquid ribbons down through the park in the valley, and through the magnificent gardens to pour into the pool. These have given the Aigues its name; Les Aigues-Vives, the living water, it used to be on old title-deeds, in contradistinction to Les Aigues-Mortes, the dead water, but *Vives* has been suppressed. The pool empties itself into the little river that crosses the avenue, through a narrow, willow-fringed channel. The effect of the channel thus decked is charming. As you glide along it in a boat, you might fancy yourself in the nave of some vast cathedral, with the main body of the house at the further end of the channel to represent the choir; and if the sunset sheds its orange hues, barred with shadow, across the front of the château and lights up the panes, it seems to you that you see the fiery stained-glass windows. At the end of the channel you see Blangy, the principal village in the commune, which boasts some sixty houses and a country church; or, strictly speaking, this is simply an ordinary house in shocking repair, and distinguished from the rest by a wooden steeple roofed with broken tiles. A decent private house and a parsonage are likewise distinguishable.

"The commune is, for all that, a fairly large one. There

are some two hundred scattered hearths in it, besides those in the little market town itself. There are fruit-trees along the wayside, and the land is cut up here and there into gardens, regular laborers' gardens, where everything is crowded into a little space, flowers, and onions, and cabbages, and vines, and gooseberry-bushes, and a great many dung-heaps. The village itself has an unsophisticated air; it looks rustic, with that very tidy simplicity which painters prize so highly. And further away, quite in the distance, you see the little town of Soulanges on the edge of a large sheet of water, like an imitation Lake of Thun.

"When you walk here in the park, with its four gates each in the grand style, you find your Arcadia of mythology grow flat as Beauce. The real Arcadia is in Burgundy, and not in Greece; Arcadia is the Aigues, and nowhere else. The little streams have united to make the river that winds along the lowest grounds of the park, hence the cool stillness peculiar to it, and the appearance of loneliness that puts you in mind of the Chartreuse, an idea carried out by a hermitage on an island contrived in the midst; without, it looks like a ruin in good earnest; within, its elegance is worthy of the taste of the sybarite-financier who planned it.

"The Aigues, my dear fellow, once belonged to that Bouret who spent two millions on a single occasion when Louis XV. came here. How many stormy passions, distinguished intellects, and lucky circumstances have combined to make this beautiful place what it is. One of Henri IV.'s mistresses rebuilt the present château, and added the forest to the estate. Then the château was given to Mlle. Choin, a favorite of the Grand Dauphin, and she too enlarged the Aigues by several farms. Bouret fitted up the house with all the refinements of luxury to be found in the snug Parisian paradises of operatic celebrities. It was Bouret, too, who restored the ground-floor rooms in the style of Louis XV.

"The dining-hall struck me dumb with wonder. Your eyes are attracted first to the fantastic arabesques of the ceiling, which is covered with frescos in the Italian manner.

Stucco women terminating in leafage bear baskets of fruit, from which the foliage of the ceiling springs. On the wall spaces between the figures some unknown artists painted wonderful designs, all the glories of the table; salmon, and boars' heads, and shell-fish, and every edible thing that by any strange freak of resemblance can recall the human form —man, woman, or child; for whimsicality of invention the designer might rival the Chinese, who, to my thinking, best understand decorative art. A spring is set under the table in the floor by the chair of the mistress of the house, so that she may touch the bell with her foot to summon the servants without interrupting the conversation or disturbing her pose. Paintings of voluptuous scenes are set above the doors. All the embrasures are of marble mosaic, and the hall is warmed from beneath. From every window there is a delicious view.

"The dining-hall communicates with a bathroom on the one hand, and a boudoir on the other. The bathroom is lined with Sèvres tiles, painted in monochrome, after Boucher's designs; the floor is paved with mosaic; the bath itself with marble. In an alcove, screened by a painting on copper, raised by means of pulleys and a counterpoise, there is a couch of gilded wood in the very height of the Pompadour style. The lapis blue ceiling is spangled with golden stars. In this way the bath, the table, and the loves are brought together.

"Beyond the salon, in all the glory of the style of Louis XIV., is the splendid billiard-room. I do not know that it has its match in Paris. At the further end of the semicircular entrance-hall, the finest and daintiest of staircases, lighted from above, leads to the various suites of apartments, built in different centuries. And yet, my dear fellow, they cut off the heads of farmers-general in 1793! Good heavens! why cannot people understand that miracles of art are impossible without great fortunes and lordly lives of secure tranquillity. If the Opposition must needs put kings to death, they might leave us a few petty princes to keep up insignificant great state.

"At the present day these accumulated treasures are in the keeping of a little woman with an artist's temperament. Not content with restoring the place on a large scale, she makes a labor of love of their custody. Philosophers, falsely so called, who are wholly taken up with themselves, while apparently interested in Humanity, call these pretty things extravagances. They will swoon away before a spinning-jenny, and wax faint with bliss over tiresome modern industrial inventions, as if we of to-day were any greater or any happier than they of the time of Henri IV., of Louis XIV., or Louis XVI., who set their seal upon this château of the Aigues. What palace, what royal château, what houses, or works of art, or golden brocaded stuffs, shall *we* leave behind us? We rummage out our grandmothers' petticoats to cover our armchairs. Like knavish and selfish life-tenants, we pull everything down that we may plant cabbages where marvellous palaces stood. But yesterday the plow went over the domain of Persan, whence one of the richest families of the Parliament of Paris took its name; Montmorency has fallen under the hammer—Montmorency, on which one of the Italians about Napoleon spent incredible sums; then there is Le Val, the work of Regnaud de Saint-Jean-d'Angély; and Cassan, built by the mistress of a Prince of Conti; four royal dwelling-places in all destroyed quite lately in the valley of the Oise alone. We are making ready a Roman Campagna about Paris for the morrow of a coming sack, when the storm-wind from the North shall blow upon our plaster villas and pasteboard ornaments and . . .

"Now, just see, my dear fellow, what comes of the habit of writing journalists' padding. Here am I, rounding off a sort of article for you. Can it be that the mind, like a highway, has its ruts? I will pull myself up at once, for I am robbing them at the office, and robbing myself, and, probably, to make you yawn. There goes the second bell for one of those abundant breakfasts, long fallen into disuse, in the ordinary way, of course, in Parisian houses. You shall have the rest of this to-morrow.

"Now for the history of my Arcadia. In 1815 there died at the Aigues one of the most celebrated *impures* of last century, an opera singer, overlooked by the guillotine, and forgotten by the aristocracy, literature, and finance; intimate as she had been with finance, literature, and the aristocracy, and on a bowing acquaintance with the guillotine, she had fallen into neglect, like many charming old ladies, who expiate the triumphs of youth in the country, and take a new love for a lost love, nature replacing human nature. Such women live with the flowers, the scent of the woods, the open sky, and the light of the sun, with everything that sings, or flutters, or shines, or springs from the earth; birds, or lizards, or blossoms, or grass. They know nothing about these things; they do not seek to explain it, but they have a capacity for loving left in age; and so well do they love, that dukes and marshals, old jealousies and bickerings, and farmers-general, and their follies and luxurious extravagance, and paste gems and diamonds, and rouge and high-heeled pantofles, are all forgotten for the sweets of a country life.

"I am in the possession of valuable information which throws a light on Mlle. Laguerre's later life; for I have felt rather uncomfortable now and again about the old age of such as Florine, and Mariette, and Suzanne du Val-Noble, and Tullia, just like any child who puzzles his wits to know where all the old moons go.

"Mlle. Laguerre took fright in 1790 at the turn things were taking, and came to settle down at the Aigues, which Bouret had bought for her (he spent several summers here with her). The fate of the du Barry put her in such a quaking that she buried her diamonds. She was only fifty-three years old at the time, and, according to her woman (who has married a gendarme here, a Mme. Sougry, whom they call *Mme. la Mairesse*, a piece of brazen-fronted flattery), 'Madame was handsomer than ever.' Nature, my dear fellow, has her reasons for what she does, no doubt, when she treats these creatures as pet children; debauchery does not kill

them; on the contrary, they thrive, and flourish, and renew their youth upon it; lymphatic though they look, they have nerves which sustain their marvellous framework, and bloom perennially from a cause which would make a virtuous woman hideous. Decidedly, Fate is not a moral agent.

"Mlle. Laguerre's life here was above reproach, nay, might it not almost be classed with the Lives of the Saints, after that famous adventure of hers? One evening, driven distracted by hopeless love, she fled from the Opera in her stage costume, and spent the night in weeping by the road-side out in the fields (how we have slandered love in the time of Louis XV.!). The dawn was so unwonted a sight to her that she sang her sweetest airs to greet it. Some peasants gathered about her, attracted as much by her pose as by her tinsel fripperies, and amazed by her gestures, her beauty, and her singing, they one and all took her for an angel, and fell upon their knees. But for Voltaire, there would have been another miracle at Bagnolet.

"I know not whether Heaven will give much credit to this sinner for her tardy virtue, for a life of pleasure becomes loathsome to one so palled with pleasure as a wanton of the stage of the time of Louis XV. Mlle. Laguerre was born in 1740. She was in the full bloom of her beauty in 1760, when they nicknamed M. de —— (the name escapes me) *Ministre de la guerre*, on account of his *liaison* with her.

"She changed her name, which was quite unknown in the country, called herself Mme. des Aigues, the better to bury herself in the district, and amused herself by keeping up her estate with extremely artistic taste. When Bonaparte became First Consul, she rounded off her property with some of the Church lands, selling her diamonds to buy them; and as an opera-girl is scarcely fitted to shine in the management of estates, she left the land to her steward, and devoted her personal attention to her park, her fruit-trees, and her flower-garden.

"Mademoiselle being dead and buried at Blangy, the notary from Soulanges (the little place between Ville-aux-

Fayes and Blangy) made an exhaustive inventory, and in course of time discovered the famous singer's next-of-kin; she herself knew nothing about them; but eleven families, poor agricultural laborers, living near Amiens, lay down in rags one night, and woke up next morning in sheets of gold.

"The Aigues had to be sold, of course, and Montcornet bought it. In various posts in Spain and Pomerania he had managed to save the requisite amount, something like eleven hundred thousand francs. The furniture was included in the purchase. It seems as if the fine place must always belong to some one in the War Department. Doubtless, the General was not insensible to the luxurious influences of his ground-floor apartments, and in talking to the Countess yesterday I insisted that the Aigues had determined his marriage.

"If you are to appreciate the Countess, my dear fellow, you must know that the General is choleric in temper, sanguine in complexion, and stands five feet nine inches; is round as a barrel, bull-necked, and the owner of a pair of shoulders for which a smith might forge a model cuirass. Montcornet commanded a company of Cuirassiers at Essling (called by the Austrians Gross-Aspern), and did not lose his life when his magnificent cavalry was pushed back into the Danube. Man and horse managed to cross the river on a huge beam of wood. The Cuirassiers, finding that the bridge was broken, turned like heroes when Montcornet gave the word, and stood their ground against the whole Austrian army. They took up more than thirty cartloads of cuirasses next day on the field, and among themselves the Germans coined a special nickname for the Cuirassiers—those 'men of iron.' [1]

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[1] I set my face on principle against foot-notes; but the present one, the first which I have permitted myself, may be excused on the score of its historical interest. It will show, moreover, that battle scenes have yet to be described in other than the dry technical language of military writers, who, for three thousand years, can speak of nothing but right wings, left wings, and centres more or less routed, but say not a word of the soldier, his heroism, and his hardships. The conscientious manner in which I am setting about the *Scènes de la vie militaire* has meant a series of visits to every battlefield at home or abroad watered

"Montcornet looks like a hero of ancient times. He has strong muscular arms, a broad resonant chest, a head striking from its leonine character, and a voice that can sound the command to 'Charge!' above the din of battle: but his is the courage of a sanguine temperament—unreasoning and uncalculating. Montcornet is an awe-inspiring figure at first sight, like many another general whom the soldier's common-sense, the wariness of a man who continually takes his life in his hand, and the habit of command seemingly raise above other men. You take him for a Titan, but he harbors a dwarf in him, like the pasteboard giant who greeted Queen Elizabeth at the gate of Kenilworth Castle. Choleric and kind, full of the pride of the Empire, he has the caustic

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by French blood, so I determined to see the field of Wagram. As I reached the bank of the Danube opposite Lobau, I noticed ribbed marks under the soft grass, something like the furrows in a field of luzerne, and asked the peasant, our guide, about this new system of agriculture (for so I took it to be). "That is where the Cuirassiers of the Imperial Guard are lying," he said; "they are buried under those mounds that you see." The words sent a shiver through me; and Prince Friedrich von Schwartzenberg, who interpreted them, added that this very peasant had driven the train of carts full of the cuirasses of the dead, and that by one of the grotesque accidents of war it was the same man who prepared Napoleon's breakfast on the morning of the battle. Poor though he was, he had kept the double napoleon which the Emperor had given him for his eggs and milk. The curé of Gross-Aspern showed us over the famous cemetery where Frenchmen and Austrians fought in blood halfway to the knee with courage equally obstinate and equally splendid on either side. But there was a marble tablet in the place on which we concentrated our whole attention, the curé explaining how that it was erected to the memory of the owner of Gross-Aspern, killed on the third day of the fight, and that it was the only return made to the family. Then he said, with deep sadness in his tones, "That was a time of great misery; a time of great promises; but now to-day is the day of forgetfulness. . . ." The words seemed to me to be grandly simple; but when I had thought the matter over, the apparent ingratitude of the House of Austria seemed to me to be justifiable. Neither peoples nor kings are rich enough to reward all the devotion shown in the hour of supreme struggle. Let those who serve a cause with a lurking thought of reward set a price on their blood, and turn *condottieri!* Those who handle sword or pen for their country should think of nothing but how to "play the man," as our forefathers used to say, and accept nothing, not even glory itself, save as a lucky accident.

Three times they stormed that famous cemetery; the third time Masséna made his famous address to his men from the coach body in which they carried the wounded hero, "You've five sous a day, you blackguards, and I've forty millions, and you let me go in front!" Every one knows the order of the day that the Emperor sent to his lieutenant by M. de Sainte-Croix, who swam the Danube three times, "Die, or take the village again; the existence of the Army is at stake! The bridges are broken."—THE AUTHOR.

tongue of a soldier, quick with a word, quicker still with a blow. The man who made so grand a figure on the battle-field becomes unbearable in domestic life, all his ideas of love were learned in the camp, his is that soldiers' love for whom the ancients (ingenious makers of myths) discovered a tutelary deity in Eros—offspring of Mars and Venus. Those delicious religious chroniclers admit half a score of different Loves. Make a study of the paternity and attributes of each, and you will provide yourself with a social nomenclature of the completest kind. We imagine that we invent this or that, do we?—When the globe, like a dreaming sick man, turns again through another cycle, and our continents become oceans, the Frenchman of the coming time will find a steam-engine, a cannon, a copy of a daily paper, and a charter, lying wrapped about with weeds at the bottom of our present Atlantic.

"Now, the Countess, my dear boy, is a little woman, fragile and delicate and timid. What say you to this marriage? Any one who knows the world, knows that this sort of thing happens so often that a well-assorted marriage is an exception. I came here to see how this tiny slender woman holds the leading strings; for she has this huge, tall, square-built General of hers quite as well in hand as ever he kept his Cuirassiers.

"If Montcornet raises his voice before his Virginie, Madame lays her finger on her lips, and he holds his tongue. The old soldier goes to smoke his pipe or cigar in a summer-house fifty paces away from the château, and perfumes himself before he comes back. He is proud of his subjection. If anything is suggested, he turns to her, like a bear infatuated for grapes, with 'That is as Madame pleases.' He comes to his wife's room, the paved floor creaking like boards under his heavy tread; and if she cries in a startled voice, 'Do not come in!' he describes a right wheel in military fashion, meekly remarking, 'You will let me know when I may come and speak to you . . .' and this from the voice that roared to his Cuirassiers on the banks of the Danube, 'Boys,

there is nothing for it but to die, and to die handsomely, since there is nothing else to be done!' A touching little thing I once heard him say of his wife, 'I not only love her, I reverence her.' Sometimes, in one of his fits of rage, when his wrath knows no bounds, and pours out in torrents that carry all before it, the little woman goes to her room and leaves him to storm. But four or five days later she will say, 'Don't put yourself in a passion, you will break a blood-vessel on your lungs, to say nothing of the pain it gives me,' and the Lion of Essling takes to flight to dry the tears in his eyes. If he comes into the salon when we are deep in conversation, 'Leave us,' she says, 'he is reading something to me,' and the General goes.

"None but strong men, great-natured and hot-tempered, among these thunderbolts of battle, diplomats with Olympian brows and men of genius, are capable of these courses of confidence, of generosity for weakness, of constant protection and love without jealousy, of this *bonhomie* with a woman. Faith! I rate the Countess's science as far above crabbed and peevish virtues as the satin of a settee above the Utrecht velvet of a dingy back-parlor sofa.

"Six days have I spent in this admirable country, dear fellow, and I am not tired yet of admiring the wonders of this park land with the dark forests rising above it, and the paths beside the streams. Everything here fascinates me—Nature, and the stillness of Nature, quiet enjoyment, the easy life which Nature offers. Ah! here is real literature, there are never defects of style in a meadow; and complete happiness would be complete forgetfulness even of the *Débats*.

"You ought not to need to be told that we have had two wet mornings. While the Countess slept, and Montcornet tramped over his property, driven to keep the promise so rashly given, I have been writing to you.

"Hitherto, though I was born in Alençon, the son of an old justice and a prefect (if what they tell me is true), though I am something of a judge of grass land, I had heard of such things as estates that brought in four or five thousand francs

a month, but I regarded these as idle tales. Money, for me, has but four hideous convertible terms—work, booksellers, journalism, and politics. When shall *we* have an estate where money grows out of the earth, in some pretty place in the country? That is what I wish you in the name of the theatre, the press, and literature. Amen!

"How Florine will envy the lamented Mlle. Laguerre! Our modern Bourets have lost the old French lordly instinct which taught them how to live; they will club three together to take a box at the Opera, and go shares in a pleasure; no longer do they cut down magnificently bound quartos to match the octavos on their shelves. It is as much as they will do to buy a book in paper-covers. What are we coming to? Good-by, children; keep your benign Blondet in loving remembrance."

If this letter, which dropped from the idlest pen in France, had not been preserved by a miraculous chance, it would be all but impossible now to describe the Aigues as it used to be, and without this description the twice tragical tale of the events which took place there would perhaps be less interesting.

Plenty of people expect, no doubt, to see the General's cuirass lighted up by a lightning flash, to see his wrath kindled, his fury descend like a waterspout on this little woman; in fact, to find the usual curtain scene of modern drama—a tragedy in a bedroom. How should this modern tragedy develop itself in the pretty salon beyond the bluish enamelled doorways, garrulous with mythological loves? Strange bright birds were painted over the ceiling and the shutters; china monsters were splitting their sides with laughter on the mantel-shelf; the blue dragons played on the rich vases, twisting their tails in spiral scrolls along the rim which some Japanese artist enamelled with a maze of color to please his fancy, and the very chairs, lounges, sofas, console tables, and stands dwelt in an atmosphere of contemplative idleness enervating to body and mind. No; this tragedy extends

beyond the sphere of domestic life, it is played out upon a higher or a lower stage. Do not look for passion here; the bare truth will be only too dramatic. And the historian moreover should never forget that it is his duty to allot to each his part; that the rich and the poor are equal before his pen; and for him the figure of the peasant has the greatness of his miseries, the rich man the pettiness of his absurdities. After all, the rich have passions, the peasant knows nothing beyond natural cravings, and therefore the peasant's lot is doubly poor; and if it is a political necessity that his aggressions should be sternly checked, from a human and religious point of view he should be treated reverently.

II

A BUCOLIC OVERLOOKED BY VIRGIL

WHEN A PARISIAN drops down into some country place, and finds himself cut off from all his accustomed ways, he soon finds time hang heavily on his hands in spite of the utmost ingenuity on the part of his entertainers. Indeed your host and hostess, being aware that the pleasures of a *tête-à-tête* (by nature fugitive) cannot endure forever, will tell you placidly that "you will find it very dull here"; and, in fact, any one who wishes to know the delights of a life in the country must have some interest to keep him in the country, must know its toils and the alternations of pain and pleasure that make up harmony—the eternal symbol of human life.

When the visitor has recovered from the effects of the journey, made up arrears of slumber, and has fallen in with country ways of life, a Parisian who is neither a sportsman nor a farmer, and wears thin walking shoes, is apt to discover that the early morning hours pass slowest of all. The women are still asleep or at their toilettes, and invisible until

breakfast time; the master of the house went out early to see after his affairs; and from eight o'clock till eleven therefore (for in nearly all châteaux they breakfast at that hour) a Parisian is left to his own society. He seeks amusement in the small details of his toilet, a short-lived expedient; and unless a man of letters has brought down with him some bit of work (which he finds impossible to do, and takes back to town untouched, and with no added knowledge of it save of the difficulties at the outset), he is reduced to pace the alleys in the park, to gape and gaze and count the tree trunks. The easier a life is, the more irksome it grows, unless you happen to belong to the Shaker community, or to the worshipful company of carpenters or bird-stuffers.

If, like the landowners, you were to remain in the country for the rest of your days, you would provide your tedium with some hobby—geological, mineralogical, botanical, or what not; but no sensible man will contract a vice that may last through his life for the sake of killing time for a fortnight. The most magnificent country-house soon becomes wearisome to those who own nothing of it but the view; the beauties of nature seem very paltry compared with the theatrical representations of them, and Parisian life sparkles from every facet. If a man is not under the particular spell which keeps him attached (like Blondet) to spots honored by *her* footsteps and lighted by *her* eyes, he is fit to envy the birds their wings, that so he may return to the ceaseless and thrilling dramatic spectacle of Paris, and its harrowing struggles for existence.

From the length of the journalist's letter, any shrewd observer should guess that the writer had mentally and physically reached that peculiar phase of repletion consequent on satisfied desire and glut of happiness, which is perfectly illustrated by the state of the domestic fowl, when, fattened by force, with head declining upon a too protuberant crop, the victim stands planted on both feet, unable and unwilling to give so much as a glance to the most tempting morsel. When, therefore, Blondet had finished his formida-

ble letter, he felt a longing to go beyond the bounds of this Armida's Garden, to find anything to enliven the deadly dulness of the early hours of the day, for between breakfast and dinner he spent his time with his hostess, who knew how to make it pass quickly.

Mme. de Montcornet had kept a clever man a whole month in the country, and had not seen the feigned smile of satiety on his face, nor detected the incipient yawn of boredom which can never be concealed. This is one of a woman's greatest triumphs. An affection proof against such tests should last forever. Why women do not put their lovers on a trial which neither fool nor egoist nor narrow nature can abide, is utterly incomprehensible. Philip II. himself, that Alexander of dissimulation, would have begun to blab his secrets after a month's *tête-à-tête* in the country. For which reason, kings spend their lives in a perpetual bustle and racket, and never allow anybody to see them for more than a quarter of an hour at a time.

Yet notwithstanding the delicate attentions of one of the most charming women in Paris, Émile Blondet played truant with a relish long forgotten. The day when his letter was finished he told François (the head servant, specially appointed to wait upon him) to call him early. He had made up his mind to explore the valley of the Avonne.

The Avonne at its head is a small river. Many streams that rise round about the Aigues go to swell it below Conches, and at Ville-aux-Fayes it joins one of the largest affluents of the Seine. The Avonne is navigable for rafts for four leagues; Jean Rouvet's invention has given all their commercial value to the forests of Aigues, Soulanges, and Ronquerolles, on the heights above the picturesque river. The park of the Aigues takes up most of the valley between the river that flows below the wooded heights on either side, called the Forest of the Aigues, and the king's highway, mapped out on the horizon by a line of old warped elm-trees running parallel with the hills (so called)

of the Avonne, the lowest steps of the grand amphitheatre of the Morvan.

To use a homely metaphor, the shape of the park was something like a huge fish lying in the valley bottom, with the head at Conches and the tail at Blangy, the length much exceeding the breadth, and the broadest part in the middle full five times the width of the valley at Blangy, or six times the width at Conches. Possibly the lay of the land, thus set among three villages (Soulanges, whence you plunge down into this Eden, being but a league away), may have assisted to foment discord, and suggested the excesses which form the chief subject of this *Scène;* for if passing travellers look down on the paradise of the Aigues from Ville-aux-Fayes with envious eyes, how should the well-to-do townsfolk of Soulanges and Ville-aux-Fayes feel less covetous when they behold it every day of their lives?

This last bit of topographical detail is needed if the position is to be understood, as well as the why and wherefore of four park gates at the Aigues; for the whole park was shut in by walls, save where a ha-ha fence had been substituted for the sake of the view. The four gates, called respectively the Conches gate, the Avonne, the Avenue, and Blangy gates, were so full of the character of the different times in which they were built, that they shall be described in their place for the benefit of archæologists; but the subject shall receive the concise treatment which Blondet gave to the avenue itself.

For a week the illustrious editor of the "Journal des Débats" had taken his walks abroad with the Countess, till he knew by heart the Chinese pavilion, bridges, islands, kiosks, hermitage, chalet, ruined temple, Babylonish ice-house; in short, all the ins and outs of the gardens planned by an architect with nine hundred acres at his disposal. Now, therefore, he felt inclined to trace the course of the Avonne, which his host and hostess daily praised to him. Every evening he had planned the excursion, every morning he forgot all about it. And, indeed, above the park

the Avonne is like an Alpine torrent, hollowing out its rocky bed, and fashioning deep pools, where it sinks underground. Here and there there is a waterfall, when some little stream unexpectedly splashes into it; here and there it broadens out like a miniature Loire, and ripples over sandy shallows, but it is a stream so changeful in its moods that rafts are out of the question. Blondet struck up through the park by the shortest way to the Conches gate, which deserves a few words of description, if only for the sake of the historical associations connected with the property.

The founder of the Aigues was a cadet of the house of Soulanges, who married an heiress, and was minded to snap his fingers at his oldest brother, an amiable sentiment to which we also owe the Isola-Bella, the fairyland on Lake Maggiore. In the Middle Ages the castle of the Aigues stood beside the Avonne; but of the whole stronghold only one gateway remained, a porched gateway of the kind usual in fortified towns, with a pepper-box turret on either side of it. The ponderous masonry above the arch was gay with wallflowers, and pierced by three great mullion windows. A spiral staircase had been contrived to give access to two dwelling-rooms in the first turret, and to a kitchen in the second. On the roof ridge of the porch, steep pitched, like all such constructions in the olden time, stood a couple of weather-cocks, adorned with quaint ironwork. Not many places can boast of a town hall so imposing.

The scutcheon of the Soulanges family was still visible on the keystone of the arch of a hard stone selected for its purpose by the craftsman whose chisel had engraven the arms of Soulanges—*azure, three palmer's staves per pale argent, five crosslets fitchy sable on a fess gules over all*, differenced by a mark of cadency. Blondet spelled out the device *Je soule agir*—It is my wont to act—a bit of word play such as Crusaders loved to make on their names, and an excellent maxim which Montcornet to his sorrow neglected, as shall be seen. The heavy old wooden door was heavier yet by reason of the iron studs arranged in groups of five upon

it. A pretty girl opened it for Blondet; and a keeper, awakened by the groaning of the hinges, put his head out of the window. The man was in his night-shirt.

"What is this? Our keepers are still abed at this time of day, are they?" thought the Parisian, who imagined that he knew all about forest customs.

With a quarter of an hour's walk he reached the springs of the river, and from the upper end of the valley at Conches the whole enchanting view lay before his eyes. A description of that landscape, like the history of France, might fill a thousand volumes, or could be condensed into a single book. Let a couple of phrases suffice.

Picture a bulging mass of rock, covered with the velvet of dwarf shrubs, placed so that it looks like some huge tortoise set across the Avonne which wears its way out at the foot, a rock that describes an arch through which you behold a little sheet of water, clear as a mirror, where Avonne seems to sleep before it breaks in waterfalls over the huge bowlders where the dwarf willows, supple as springs, perpetually yield to the force of the current, only to fly back again.

Up above the waterfalls the hillsides are cut sharply away, like some Rhineland crag clad with mosses and heather; they are rifted, too, like the Rhine crag by strata of schist, where springs of white water bubble out here and there, each one above a little space of grass, always fresh and green, which serves as a cup for the spring; and finally, by way of contrast to the wild solitude of nature, you see the outposts of civilization: Conches, and the gardens on the edge of the fields, and beyond the picturesque wilderness the assembled roofs of the village and the church spire.

Behold the two phrases! But the sunrise, the pure air, the dew crystals, the blended music of woods and water, these must be divined!

"Faith, it is nearly as fine as the Opera!" said Blondet to himself, as he clambered up the torrent bed of the

Avonne. The caprices of the higher stream brought out all the depth, stillness, and straightness of the Avonne in the valley, shut in by tall trees and the Forest of the Aigues. He did not, however, pursue his morning walk very far. He was soon brought to a stand by a peasant, one of the subordinate characters so necessary to the action of this drama that it is doubtful whether they or the principal characters play the more important parts.

Blondet, that clever writer, reached a bowlder-strewn spot, where the main stream was pent as if between two doors, when he saw the man standing so motionless that his journalist's curiosity would have been aroused, even if the figure and clothing of the living statue had not already puzzled him not a little.

In that poverty-stricken figure he saw an old man such as Charlet loved to draw; the strongly-built frame, schooled to endure hardship, might have belonged to one of the troopers depicted by the soldier's Homer; the rugged purplish-red countenance gave him kinship with Charlet's immortal scavengers, unschooled by resignation. An almost bald head was protected from the inclemency of the weather by a coarse felt hat, the brim stitched to the crown here and there, and from under the hat one or two locks of hair straggled out; an artist would have given four francs an hour for the chance of studying from the life that dazzling snow, arranged after the fashion of the Eternal Father of classic art. Yet there was something in the way in which the cheeks sank in, continuing the lines of the mouth, that plainly said that this toothless old person went more often to the barrel than to the bread-hutch. The short white bristles of a scanty beard gave an expression of menace to his face. A pair of little eyes, oblique as a pig's, and too small for his huge countenance, suggested a combination of sloth and cunning; but at that moment, as he pored upon the river, fire seemed to flash from them.

For all clothing the poor man wore a blouse, which had been blue in former times, and a pair of trousers of the

coarse canvas that they use in Paris for packing material. Any town-dweller would have shuddered at the sight of his broken sabots, without so much as a little straw by way of padding in the cracks. As for the blouse and trousers, they had reached the stage when a textile fabric is fit for nothing but the pulping trough of a paper-mill.

Blondet, as he gazed at the rustic Diogenes, was convinced that the typical peasant of old tapestry, old pictures, and carvings was not, as he had hitherto imagined, a purely fancy portrait. Nor did he utterly condemn, as heretofore, the productions of the School of Ugliness; he began to see that in man the beautiful is but a gratifying exception to a general rule, a chimerical vision in which he struggles to believe.

"I wonder what the ideas and manner of life of such a human being may be! What is he thinking about?" Blondet asked himself, and curiosity seized upon him. "Is that my fellow man? We have only our human shape in common, and yet—"

He looked at the hard tissues peculiar to those who lead an out-of-door life, accustomed to all weathers, and to excessive heat and cold, and to hardships, in fact, of every kind, a training which turns the skin to something like tanned leather, and makes the sinews wellnigh pain-proof, like those of the Arabs or Cossacks.

"That is one of Fenimore Cooper's Redskins," said Blondet to himself; "there is no need to go to America to study the savage."

The Parisian was not two paces away, but the old man did not look round; he stood and stared at the opposite bank with the fixity that glazes a Hindoo fakir's eyes and induces anchylosis of every joint. This kind of magnetism is more infectious than people think; it was too much for Blondet; he too began at last to stare into the water.

A good quarter of an hour went by in this way, and Blondet still found no sufficient motive for the proceeding.

"Well, my good man," he asked, "what is there over yonder?"

"Hush-sh!" the other said, with a sign to Blondet that he must not disturb the air with his voice. "You will scare her—"

"Who?"

"An otter, mister. If her hears us, her's just the one to give us the slip and get away under water. There ain't no need to say that her jumped in there. There! Do you see the water a-bubbling up? Oh, her's lying in wait for a fish; but when her tries to come out, my boy will catch hold of her. It's like this, you see, an otter is the rarest thing. It is a scientific animal to catch, fine and delicate eating, all the same; they will give me ten francs for it at the Aigues, seeing as the lady there doesn't eat meat of a Friday, and to-morrow is Friday. Time was when the lady that's dead and gone has paid me as much as twenty francs for one, and her would let me have the skin back too!—Mouche," he called in a loud whisper, "keep a good lookout—"

On the other side of this branch stream of the Avonne, Blondet saw a pair of eyes gleaming like a cat's eyes from under a clump of alders; then he made out the brown forehead and shock head of a boy of twelve or thereabout, who was lying there flat on his stomach; the urchin pointed out the otter, with a sign which indicated that he was keeping the animal in view. The consuming anxiety of the old man and the child got the better of Blondet; he fell a willing victim to the devouring demon of Sport.

Now that demon has two claws, called Hope and Curiosity, by which he leads you whither he will.

"You sell the skin to the hatters," the old man went on. "So fine it is and soft. They make caps of it—"

"Do you believe that, my good man?"

"Of course, mister, you ought to know a lot more about it than I do, for all I am seventy years old," said the old person meekly and respectfully; then, with unctuous insinua-

tion—"and you can tell me, no doubt, why coach-guards and innkeepers think such a lot of it, sir?"

Blondet, that master of irony, had his suspicions; the word "scientific" had not escaped him; he remembered the Maréchal de Richelieu, and fancied that this old rustic was laughing at him, but the simplicity of the man's manner and stupid expression dismissed the idea.

"There were plenty of otters to be seen hereabout when I was young, the country suits them," the good soul went on; "but they have hunted them down so much that if we see a tail of one on 'em once in seven years, it is the most you will do. There's the *sub-perfect* over at Ville-aux-Fayes —you know him, mister?—He is a nice young man, like you, for all he is a Parisian, and he is fond of curiosities. So, knowing that I was good at catching otters, for I know them as well as ever you know your alphabet, he just says to me like this, 'Father Fourchon, when you find an otter, you bring it to me,' says he, 'and I'll pay you well for it; and if her should have white dots on her back,' he says, 'I would give you thirty francs for her.' That's what he says to me on the quay at Ville-aux-Fayes, and that's the truth; true as I believe in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. There is another learned man over at Soulanges, M. Gourdon, our doctor he is, they say he is making a cabinet of natural history; there is not his like in Dijon, he is the learnedest man in these parts in fact, and he would give me a good price for her! He knows how to stuff man and beast! And there's my boy here stands me out that this one is white *all over!*—'If that is so,' I says to him, 'the Lord A'mighty have borne us in mind this morning!' Look at the water a-bubbling, do you see?—Oh! her's there.— Her lives in a kind of a burrow on land, but for all that, her'll stop under water whole days together.—Ah! her heard you, mister, her is suspicious, for there ain't no animile cleverer than that one; her is worse than a woman."

"Perhaps that is why the otter is called *her*," suggested Blondet.

"Lord, mister, being from Paris as you are, you know better about it than we do. But you would have done us a better turn by lying a-bed of a morning, because—do you see that ripple-like over yonder?—Her's getting away underneath. . . . Come along, Mouche! Her has heard the gentleman, her has, and her is just the one to keep us here cooling our heels till midnight; let us be going.—There's our thirty francs swimming away."

Mouche got up, but wistfully. He was a touzle-headed youth, with a brown face, like an angel's in some fifteenth century picture. To all intents and purposes, he wore breeches, for his trousers ended at the knee in a jagged fringe ornamented with thorns and dead leaves. This indispensable garment was secured to his person by a couple of strands of tow by way of braces, and a shirt of sacking (originally of the same pattern as his grandsire's trousers, but thickened by raw-edged patches) left a sunburned chest exposed to view. In the matter of simplicity Mouche's clothes marked a distinct advance on old Fourchon's costume.

"What good, simple souls they are out here!" said Blondet to himself. "Round about Paris the work-people would cut up rough if a swell came and spoiled sport." And as he had never set eyes on an otter, not even in the Museum, he was quite delighted with this episode in his walk.

"Come, now," he began, feeling touched, for the old man was going away without asking for anything, "you say that you are an expert otter-hunter.—If you are sure that the otter is there—"

Mouche, on the opposite bank, pointed to the air-bubbles rising to the surface of the Avonne, to die away in eddies in the middle of the pool.

"Her has gone back again," said old Fourchon; "her has been to draw a breath of air, the slut! It is her as has made that fuss there. How do her manage to breathe under water? But the thing's so cunning, it laughs at science."

"Very well," said Blondet, deciding that the last pleasantry was a current bucolic witticism, and no product of

the brain of the individual before him; "stop and catch the otter."

"And how about our day's work, mine and Mouche's?"

"What is a day's work?"

"For the two of us, me and my apprentice? . . . Five francs—" said the old man, looking Blondet in the eyes with a hesitation which plainly said that this was a prodigious overstatement.

The journalist took some coins from his pocket, saying, "Here are ten francs for you, and you shall have at least as much again for the otter."

"Her'll be cheap to you at that, if her has white dots on her back, for the *sub-perfect* told me that our museum has only one of that sort.—And he knows a good deal, all the same, does our *sub-perfect*, he is no fool. If I go after otters, Master des Lupeaulx is after Master Gaubertin's daughter, who has a fine white *dot* on her back.—Stay, mister, no offence to you, but you go and beat up the water by that stone yonder in the Avonne. When we have driven out the otter, her will come down with the stream, for that is a trick the animals have; them'll go up stream to fish, and when they have as much as they can carry, they come down to their burrow; they know it's easier going down stream. Didn't I tell you that they are cunning! If I had learned cunning in their school, I should be living like a gentleman at this day. I found out too late that you have to get up early in the morning to make headway up stream and get the first chance at the booty. There was a spell cast over me when I was born, in fact. Perhaps the three of us together will be too clever for the otter."

"And how, old necromancer?"

"Lord, sir, we peasants are such stupid animals ourselves that we come at last to understand the animals. This is what we will do. When the otter turns to go home, we will scare her here, and you will scare her there, and scared of both sides, her'll make a dash for the bank. If her takes to the land, it is all over with her. The thing can't walk, it's made

to swim, with its goose-feet. Oh! you will have some fun, for it is a regular double game—you fish and hunt at the same time. The General at the Aigues, where you are staying, came back three times running, he took such a fancy to the sport."

Blondet obediently hopped from stone to stone till he reached the middle of the Avonne, where he took his stand, duly provided with a green branch, which the old otter-hunter cut for him, ready to whip the stream at the word of command.

"Yes, just there, mister," and there Blondet remained, unconscious of the flight of time, for every moment the old man's gestures kept him on the lookout for a successful issue, and time never passes more quickly than when every faculty is on the alert in expectation of energetic action to succeed to the profound silence of lying in wait.

"Daddy Fourchon," the boy whispered, when he was alone with the old man, "there really be an otter there—"

"Do you see her?"

"There her is!"

The old man was dumfounded. He distinctly saw the brown skin of an otter swimming along under the water.

"Her is coming along tow'rds me," said the little fellow.

"Fetch her a slap on the head, and jump in and hold her down at the bottom, and don't let her go—"

Mouche dived into the Avonne like a scared frog.

"Quick, quick! mister," old Fourchon shouted, as he likewise jumped into the Avonne (leaving his sabots on the bank). "Just give her a scare! There! look—her is swimming tow'rds you!"

The old man splashed along through the water to Blondet, shouting with the gravity that rustics can preserve through the keenest sense of fun.

"Look, do you see her, along of those rocks?" Blondet, purposely placed so that the sun shone into his eyes, thrashed the water in all good faith.

"There! there! nearer the rocks!" shouted old Fourchon,

"that is where her hole is to your left." Carried away by vexation, excited by the long suspense, Blondet took an impromptu foot-bath, slipping off the stones into the water.

"Hold on! hold on! mister, you have got her.—Oh, heaven and earth! there she goes, right between your legs! Her is off!—Her is off!" cried the old man in desperation. And like one possessed with the fury of the chase, he splashed across till he confronted Blondet.

" 'Twas your doing that we lost her," old Fourchon continued; Blondet held out a hand, and he emerged from the water like a Triton—a vanquished Triton. "Her is there under the rock, the wench!—Her dropped her fish," he added, pointing to something floating down the stream some distance away. "Anyhow we shall have the tench, for a tench it is—"

As he spoke they saw a liveried servant on horseback, galloping along the Conches road, holding a second horse by the bridle.

"There! it looks as if the servants from the château were looking for you," he went on. "If you want to get back across the river, I will lend you a hand. Oh! I would as soon have a soaking as not, it saves you the trouble of washing your things."

"And how about catching cold?" asked Blondet.

"Ah, indeed! Don't you see that the sun has browned our shanks like an old pensioner's tobacco pipe. Lean on me, mister. You are from Paris, you don't know how to get foothold on our rocks, for so many things as you know. If you stop here a while, you will learn a sight of things out of the book of nature, you that write the news in the papers."

Blondet, arrived on the opposite bank, encountered the footman Charles.

"Ah, sir," cried the man, "you cannot imagine madame's anxiety when she heard that you had gone out through the Conches gate. She thinks that you are drowned. Three times they rang the second bell for breakfast with might and

main, after shouting all over the park, and M. le Cure is still looking for you there."

"Why, what time is it, Charles?"

"A quarter to twelve—!"

"Help me to mount—"

"Perhaps monsieur has been helping to hunt old Fourchon's otter," said the man, as he noticed the water dripping from Blondet's boots and trousers.

That question opened the journalist's eyes.

"Not a word about it, Charles, and I will bear you in mind," cried he.

"Oh, Lord love you, sir, M. le Comte himself was taken in with old Fourchon's otter. As soon as any one new to the place comes to the Aigues, old Fourchon is on the look-out for him; and if the town gentleman goes to see the springs of the Avonne, the old boy sells him his otter. He keeps it up so well that M. le Comte went back three times and paid him six days' wages while they sat and watched the water flow."

"And I used to think that I had seen the greatest comedians of the day in Potier and the younger Baptiste," said Blondet to himself, "and what are they compared with this beggar?"

"Oh! he is quite up to that game, is old Fourchon," Charles pursued. "And he has another string to his bow, for he had himself put down on the register as a ropemaker. He has his ropewalk along the wall outside the Blangy gate. If you take it into your head to meddle with his cord, he comes round you so cleverly that you begin to want to turn the wheel and make a bit of rope yourself, and then he asks you for a prentice's premium. Madame was caught that way, and gave him twenty francs. He is the king of sly-boots," said Charles, picking his words.

The man's gossip gave Blondet some opportunity of reflecting upon the profound astuteness of the peasantry; he also recalled much that had been said by his father, the judge at Alençon. Then, as all the malice lurking beneath old

Fourchon's simplicity came up in his mind, Charles's confidences put those remarks in a new light; and he confessed to himself that he had been gulled by the old Burgundian beggar.

"You would not believe, sir, how wide awake you have to be in the country, and here of all places, for the General is not very popular—"

"Why so?"

"Lord, I do not know," said Charles, with the stupid look a servant can assume to screen a refusal to his betters, a look which gave Blondet plenty of food for reflection.

"So here you are, runaway!" said the General, coming out upon the steps at the sound of horse hoofs.—"Here he is! Set your mind at rest," he called to his wife, hearing her pattering footsteps.—"Now we are all here but the Abbe Brossette. Go and look for him, Charles," he said, turning to the servant.

III

THE TAVERN

THE BLANGY GATE dated from Bouret's time. It consisted of two pilasters with "rustic" bossages, each surmounted by a rampant greyhound holding a scutcheon between its fore-paws. The steward's house was so close to the gate that the great financier had no occasion to build another for a lodge-keeper. An imposing iron grating, of the same style as those made in Buffon's time for the Jardin des Plantes, opened out upon the extreme end of the paved way which led to the cross road. Formerly the Aigues had combined with the house of Soulanges to maintain this local road which connected Conches and Cerneux and Blangy and Soulanges with Ville-aux-Fayes, as by a flowery chain, so many are the little houses covered with roses and honeysuckle and climbing plants that are

dotted about among the hedge-inclosed domains along its course.

Just outside, along a trim wall, stood a rotten post, a ramshackle wheel and heckle-boards, the entire "plant" of a village ropemaker. Further, the wall gave place to a ha-ha fence, so that the château commanded a view of the valley as far as Soulanges, and even further.

About half-past twelve o'clock, while Blondet was taking his place at table opposite the Abbe Brossette, and receiving a flattering scolding from the Countess, old Fourchon and Mouche arrived at their ropewalk. Under pretext of making rope, old Fourchon could keep an eye upon the house and spy the movements of the gentry. Indeed, a shutter could not move, no two persons could stroll away together, no trifling incident could take place at the château but the old man knew of it. He had only taken up his position there within the last three years, and neither keepers, nor servants, nor the family had noticed a circumstance so apparently insignificant.

"Go round to the Avonne gate while I put up our tackle," said old Fourchon; "and when you have chattered about this, they will come to look for me at the Grand-I-Vert. I will have a drop of something there; it is thirsty work stopping in the water like that. If you do just as I have been telling you, you will get a good breakfast out of them; try to speak with the Countess, and go on about me, so that they may take it into their heads to give me a sermon, eh! There will be a glass or two of good wine to tipple down."

With these final instructions, which, to judge from Mouche's sly looks, were almost superfluous, the old ropemaker tucked his otter under his arm and disappeared down the road.

Half way between this picturesque gateway and the village, at the time of Emile Blondet's visit, stood a house such as may be seen anywhere in France in districts where stone is scarce. Brickbats collected from all sources, and great flints roughly set in stiff clay, made fairly solid walls, though

the weather had eaten them away. Stout tree boughs upheld a roof thatched with straw and rushes; the clumsy shutters and the door, like everything else about the hovel, were either lucky "finds" or had been extorted by hard begging.

The peasant brings to the making of his dwelling the same instinct that a wild creature displays in the making of its nest or burrow; this instinct shone conspicuously in the arrangements of the whole cabin. To begin with, the door and window were on the north side, and the house, situated on a little knoll in the stoniest part of a vineyard, should have been healthy enough. It was reached by three steps, ingeniously contrived out of stakes and planks, and filled in with small stones. The rain-water very soon flowed away; and as in Burgundy rain seldom comes from the north, the foundations, flimsy though they were, did not rot with the damp. At the foot of the steps some rustic palings extended along the footpath, till they were lost to sight in a hedge of hawthorn and wildbriar. A collection of rough benches and rickety tables invited passers-by to seat themselves in the shade of the trellised vine which covered the whole space between the hut and the road. In the inclosed garden, on the top of the knoll, grew roses, and pinks, and violets, and all the flowers which cost nothing; honeysuckle and jessamine trails clung about a roof heavy already with moss, in spite of its recent date.

The owner had set up a "lean-to" cowshed against the right wall of the house. It was a crazy wooden erection, with a sort of yard of beaten earth in front of it, where a huge dunghill stood conspicuous in one corner. An outhouse at the back, a thatched roof, supported by two tree trunks, did duty as a shed for vinedressers' tools, empty casks, and heaps of fagots piled about the projecting boss of the oven, which in peasants' cottages almost invariably opens just under the chimney shelf.

About an acre of land belonged to the house, a croft inclosed with a quick-set hedge, full of vines, tended as a peasant's vines are tended, so well manured, layered, and

trenched, that they came into leaf earlier than any others for three leagues round. The slender tops of a few fruit-trees, almonds, and plums, and apricots, appeared here and there above the hedge. Potatoes or beans were usually growing among the vine stems. Another small wedge-shaped bit of land behind the yard and in the direction of the village was low and damp enough to grow the cabbages and onions dear to the laborer. A latticed gate divided it off from the yard, through which the cows passed, trampling and manuring the earth.

Inside the house, the two rooms on the ground floor opened on to the vineyard; on that side of it, a rough wooden staircase ran up the outer wall under the thatch to a garret lighted by a round window under the roof. Beneath these rustic steps a cellar, built of Burgundian bricks, contained a few hogsheads of wine.

A peasant's *batterie de cuisine* usually consists of a couple of cooking-pots, a frying-pan, and an iron kettle; but in this cottage, by way of exception to the rule, there were two huge saucepans hanging up under the mantel-shelf above a small portable stove. But in spite of this sign of comfort, the furniture generally was in keeping with the outside of the house. An earthen jar held the water; pewter spoons and wooden ladles did duty for silver plate; and the crockery ware was cracked, riveted, brown without and white within. A few deal chairs stood about a solid table, and the floor was of beaten earth. The walls were whitewashed once in five years, so were the slender rafters of the ceiling, where bacon and ropes of onions, and bunches of candles, hung among the bags in which the peasant keeps his seeds. Beside the bread-hutch stood an old cupboard of black walnut wood, containing such linen as the inmates of the cabin possessed—the spare garments and the Sunday clothes of the whole family.

An antiquated gun shone on the wall above the mantel-shelf, a poacher's weapon, for which you would not have given five francs. The gun-stock was almost charred, nor

was there any appearance about the barrel, which looked as if it never was cleaned. Perhaps you may think that as the gate stood open day and night, and the cabin door boasted no fastening but a latch, nothing more efficient in the way of firearms was needed, and ask what earthly use such a weapon might be. But in the first place, rough though the woodwork was, the barrel had been carefully selected; it had belonged to a gun of price, once given, no doubt, to some gamekeeper. And the owner of the gun never missed a shot; between him and his weapon there was the intimate understanding that exists between the craftsman and his tool. If the muzzle must be pointed a millemetre above or below the mark, the poacher knows and obeys the rule accurately, and is never out in his reckoning. And an officer of artillery would see that all the essentials were in good working order, nor more nor less. Into everything that the peasant appropriates to his uses he puts the exact amount of energy required to attain the desired end—the necessary labor, and nothing more. He has not the least idea of finish, but he is a perfect judge of the necessities in everything; he knows all the degrees in the scale of energy; and if he works for a master, knows exactly how to do the least possible amount of work for the utmost possible pay. Finally, this very gun played an important part in the family life, as shall presently be shown.

Have you realized all the countless details about this hovel, five hundred paces from the picturesque park gates? Can you picture it squatting there like a beggar by a palace wall? Well, then, beneath all its idyllic rusticity, the velvet mosses of its roof, the cackling hens, the wallowing pig, the lowing heifer, and every sight and sound there lies an ugly significance.

A high pole was set up by the front gate to exhibit to public view a bush made up of three withered branches of pine and oak, tied in a bunch by a bit of rag. Above the door stood a signboard about two feet square, on which an itinerant artist had painted (for a breakfast) a huge green letter I on

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a white field—a pun in ten letters for those who could read—the Grand-I-Vert (*hiver*). A vulgar gaudy-colored advertisement on the left-hand side of the door announced "Good March Beer," a crude representation of a woman with an exaggeratedly low-necked dress, and a hussar, in uniform, strutting on either side of a foaming pint pot. In spite of the scent of flowers and the country air, a stale reek of wine and eatables always clung about the cabin, the same odor that lies in wait for you as you pass by some pothouse in a low quarter of Paris.

The place you know. Now, behold its inmates. Their history contains more than one lesson for the philanthropist.

The owner of the Grand-I-Vert, one François Tonsard, is not unworthy of the attention of philosophers, in that he contrived to solve the problem of how to lead a life of combined industry and idleness, in such a way that his idleness was highly profitable to himself, while no one was a penny the better for his industry.

He was a jack-of-all-trades. He could dig, but only on his own land. He could also do hedging and ditching, bark trees or fell them, for other people, for in all these occupations the master is at the mercy of the man. Tonsard owed his bit of land to Mlle. Laguerre's generosity. While a mere lad he did a day's work now and again for the gardener at the château, for he had not his match at clipping trees in garden alleys, and trimmed hornbeams, and thorn-trees, and horse-chestnuts to admiration. His name Tonsard—literally, "the clipper"—is a sufficient indication of an aptitude descended from father to son, and in most country-places such monopolies are secured and maintained with as much cunning as ever city merchants use to the same end.

One day Mlle. Laguerre, strolling in her garden, overheard Tonsard, a fine strapping young fellow, saying, "All I want to live, and live happily too, is an acre of land!" Whereupon the good-natured creature, accustomed to make others happy, bestowed on Tonsard that bit of vineyard near the Blangy gate in return for a hundred days' work (a piece

of delicacy scantily appreciated), and allowed him to take up his quarters at the Aigues, where he lived among the servants, who thought him the best of good fellows in Burgundy.

"Poor Tonsard" (as everybody called him) did about thirty days' work out of the hundred, the rest of the time he spent in laughing and flirting with the maids at the house, and more particularly with Mlle. Cochet, madame's own woman, though she was as ugly as a charming actress's maid is sure to be. A laugh, with Mlle. Cochet, was something so significant that Soudry (the happy police sergeant of Blondet's letter) still gave Tonsard black looks after five-and-twenty years. The walnut wood press and the four-post bedstead with curtains, which adorned the bedroom at the Grand-I-Vert, were, no doubt, the fruit of one of these titterings.

Once in possession of his bit of land, Tonsard replied to the first person who remarked that "Madame had given it to him."

"By George, it's mine! honestly bought and honestly paid for. Do the bourgeois ever give you anything for nothing? And a hundred days' work is nothing, is it? That has cost me three hundred francs as it is, and the soil is all stones!"

The talk never went beyond the circle of the peasantry.

Tonsard next built the house himself. Finding the materials here and there, asking this one and that to do a hand's turn for him, pilfering odds and ends from the château, or asking, and invariably having what he asked for. A rickety gateway pulled down to be removed found its way to his cowshed. The window came from an old greenhouse. The hut, to prove so fatal to the château, was built up of material from the château.

Tonsard escaped military service, thanks to Gaubertin, Mlle. Laguerre's steward. Gaubertin's father was the public prosecutor of the department, and Gaubertin could refuse Mlle. Cochet nothing. When the house was finished and

the vines in full bearing, Tonsard took unto himself a wife. A bachelor of three-and-twenty on a friendly footing at the Aigues, the good-for-nothing to whom madame had given an acre of land had every appearance of being a hard worker, and he had the wit to make the most of his negative virtues. His wife was the daughter of a tenant on the Ronquerolles estate on the other side of the Forest of the Aigues.

This farmer farmed half a farm, which was going to wreck and ruin in his hands for want of a housewife. The inconsolable widower had tried to drown his cares in drink, in the English fashion; but time went on, he thought no more upon his loss, and at last found himself wedded to the wine-cask, in the jocular village phrase. Then in no long time the father-in-law ceased to be a farmer, and became a laborer, an idle, mischief-making, quarrelsome sot, sticking at nothing, like most men of his class who fall from a comparatively comfortable position into poverty. He could read and write, his education and practical knowledge raised him above the level of the ordinary laborer, though his bad habits dragged him down to the level of the tramp; and, as we have seen, he had just been a match for one of the cleverest men in Paris in a Bucolic overlooked by Virgil.

At first they made old Fourchon the village schoolmaster at Blangy, but he lost his place, partly by misconduct, partly by his peculiar views of primary education. His pupils made more progress in the art of making paper boats and chickens out of the pages of their A B C books than in reading; and his homilies on pilfering orchards were strangely like lessons on the best manner of scaling walls. They still quote one of his sayings at Soulanges, an answer given to some urchin who came late with the excuse, "Lord, sir, I had to take our 'orse to the water."

"*H*orse we say, ye dunder'ead."

From a schoolmaster he became postman. This employment, which is as good as a pension to many an old soldier, got Daddy Fourchon into trouble every day of his life. Sometimes he left the letters in a tavern, sometimes

he forgot to deliver them, sometimes he kept them in his pocket. When his wits were flustered with liquor, he would leave the correspondence of one commune in another; when he was sober he read the letters. He was promptly dismissed. Having nothing to hope in the way of a Government appointment, Daddy Fourchon at length turned his attention to manufacture. The very poorest do something in country places, and one and all, if they do not make an honest livelihood, make a pretense of earning it.

At the age of sixty-eight Fourchon took to rope-making on a small scale, that being a business in which the least possible amount of capital is needed. The first wall you find (as has been seen) is a sufficient workshop, ten francs will more than pay for your machinery; and the apprentice, like his master, sleeps in a barn, and lives on what he can pick up. So shall you evade the rapacity of the law which vexes the poor with door and window tax. The raw material you borrow, and return a manufactured article.

But Daddy Fourchon, and Mouche his apprentice (the natural son of one of his natural daughters), had another resource, in fact, their mainstay and support, in otter-hunting, to say nothing of breakfasts and dinners given to the pair by illiterate folk who availed themselves of Daddy Fourchon's talents when a letter must be written or a bill made out. Finally, the old man could play the clarionet, and in the company of a crony, the fiddler of Soulanges, Vermichel by name, figured at village weddings and great balls at the Tivoli at Soulanges.

Vermichel's real name was Michel Vert; but the transposition was so much in use, that Brunet, clerk of the justice of the peace at Soulanges, described him in all documents as "Michel-Jean-Jérôme Vert, otherwise Vermichel, witness."

Daddy Fourchon had been of use in past times to Vermichel, a fiddler held in high esteem by the old Burgundian Regiment; and Vermichel out of gratitude for those services

had procured for his friend the post of *practitioner*—(the privilege of appearing before the justice of the peace in the interests of this or that person), for which any man who can sign his name is eligible in out-of-the-way places. So Daddy Fourchon's signature was appended to any judicial documents drawn up by the Sieur Brunet in the communes of Cerneux, Conches and Blangy; and the names of Vermichel and Fourchon, bound together by a friendship cemented by twenty years of hobnobbing, seemed almost like the style of a firm.

Mouche and Fourchon, united as closely each to each by malpractices as Mentor and Telemachus of old by virtues, travelled like their anti-types in search of bread; *panis angelorum*, the only words of Latin that linger yet in the memories of gray-headed villagers. The pair negotiated the scraps at Tonsard's tavern, or at the great houses roundabout; for between them in their busiest and most prosperous years their achievement scarcely exceeded an average of some seven hundred yards of rope. In the first place, no tradesman for sixty miles round would have trusted either of them with a hank of tow, for this venerable person (anticipating the miracles of modern science) knew but too well how to transform the hemp into the divine juice of the grape. And in the second place, besides being private secretary to three communes, Fourchon appeared for plaintiff or defendant before the justice of the peace, and performed at merrymakings upon the clarionet —his public duties were the ruin of his trade, he said.

So Tonsard's hopes so fondly cherished were nipped in the bud. Those comfortable additions to his property would never be his, and the ordinary luck of life confronted a lazy son-in-law with another do-nothing in the shape of his wife's father. And things were bound to do much the worse in that La Tonsard, a tall and shapely woman with a kind of broad-blown comeliness, showed no sort of taste for field work. Tonsard bore his wife a grudge for her father's bankruptcy, and treated her badly, taking

his revenge after the fashion familiar to a class that sees the effects, but seldom traces the cause.

The wife, finding her bondage hard, sought alleviations. She took advantage of Tonsard's vices to govern him. He was an ease-loving glutton, so she encouraged him in idleness and gluttony. She managed to secure for him the good will of the servants at the chateau, and he, satisfied with the results, did not grumble at the means. He troubled himself uncommonly little about his wife's doings, so long as she did all that he required of her, a tacit understanding in which every second married couple lives. The tavern was La Tonsard's next invention, and her first customers were the servants, gamekeepers, and prickers from the Aigues.

Gaubertin, Mlle. Laguerre's agent, was one of *La Belle Tonsard's* earliest patrons; he let her have a few hogsheads of good wine to attract custom. The effect of these presents, periodically renewed so long as Gaubertin remained a bachelor, together with the fame of the not too obdurate beauty among the Don Juans of the valley, brought custom to the house. La Tonsard, being fond of good eating, became an excellent cook; and though she exercised her talents only on dishes well known in the country, such as jugged hare, game sauce, sea-pie and omelettes, she was supposed to understand to admiration the art of cooking a meal served at a table's end, and so prodigiously over-seasoned that it induces thirst. In these ways she managed Tonsard; she gave him a downward push, and he asked nothing better than to abandon himself and rolled luxuriously downhill.

The rogue became a confirmed poacher; he had nothing to fear. His wife's relations with Gaubertin, bailiffs and keepers, and the relaxed notions of property of the Revolution, assured him of complete impunity. As soon as the children grew big enough, he made what he could out of them, and was no more scrupulous as to their conduct than he had been with his wife's. He had two girls and two boys. Tonsard lived, like his wife, from hand to mouth,

and there would soon have been an end of this merry life of his if he had not laid down the almost martial law, that every one in his house must contribute to his comfort, in which for that matter the rest of them shared. By the time that the family was reared at the expense of those from whom the wife knew how to extort presents, this is a statement of the finances of the Grand-I-Vert.

Tonsard's old mother and two girls, Catherine and Marie, were always picking up firewood. Twice a day they would come home bending under the weight of a fagot that reached to the ankle and projected a couple of feet above their heads. The outside of the fagot was made of dead sticks; the green wood often cut from young saplings was hidden away inside it. In the fullest sense of the words, Tonsard took all his winter fuel from the Forest of the Aigues.

The father and both boys were habitual poachers. From September to March all the game that they did not eat at home they sold. Hares and rabbits, partridges, thrushes, and roebucks—they took them all to Soulanges, the little town where Tonsard's girls took milk from door to door every morning and carried back the news, taken in exchange for the gossip of the Aigues, Cerneux and Conches. When their season was over, the three Tonsards set snares, and if the snares were too successful, La Tonsard made pies and sold them in Ville-aux-Fayes. In harvest-time the whole family—the old mother, the two lads (until they were seventeen years old), the two girls, old Fourchon and Mouche, seven in all of the Tonsard clan—mustered and went gleaning. They would pick up nearly sixteen bushels a day among them, rye, barley, wheat—anything that was grist for the mill.

At first the youngest girl took the two cows to graze by the side of the road; though the animals for the most part broke through the hedges into the fields of the Aigues. But as the rural policeman was bound to take cognizance of anything of the nature of flagrant trespass, the slightest mis-

take on the children's part was always punished by a whipping or by the loss of some dainty, till they had become singularly expert at hearing sounds of an approaching enemy. The keepers at the Aigues and the rural policeman scarcely ever caught them in the act. Moreover, the relations between the aforesaid functionaries and the Tonsards, husband and wife, dimmed their eyes to these things. The cows soon grew obedient to a pull at the long cord, or a low peculiar call, when they found that as soon as the danger was past they might leave the roadside to finish their meal in the neighboring field.

Tonsard's old mother, growing more and more feeble, succeeded to Mouche when old Fourchon took him away under pretence of educating the boy himself. Marie and Catherine made hay in the woods. They knew the patches where the grass grows sweet and delicate, and cut and turned it, and made and stacked the hay. They found two-thirds of the winter-fodder in the woods, and on the sunniest winter days took the cows to pasture on spots well known to them, where the grass was green even in cold weather; for in certain places round about the Aigues, as in Piedmont and Lombardy and every hill country, there are bits of land where the grass grows in winter. Such a meadow, called a *marcita* in Italy, is a very valuable property there; but in France, to do well, there must be neither too much frost nor too much snow. The phenomenon is doubtless due partly to a particular aspect, partly to the infiltration of the water, which keeps the land at a higher temperature.

The calves brought in about eighty francs; and the milk, after making deductions for the calves, was worth about a hundred and sixty francs in money, besides the supply for the house and the dairy. Tonsard made some hundred and fifty crowns by doing a day's work for one and another.

The tavern, all expenses paid, brought in about three hundred francs, not more, for merry-makings are essentially short lived, and confined to certain seasons. La Tonsard

and her husband, moreover, usually received notice of a "bean-feast" beforehand, and laid in the small quantity of meat required and the necessary provisions from the town. In ordinary years the wine from the Tonsards' vineyard fetched twenty francs the cask (the cask not included); a tavern-keeper at Soulanges, with whom Tonsard had dealings, was the purchaser. In abundant years the vineyard would yield twelve hogsheads, but the average produce was eight, and half of these Tonsard kept for his own trade. In vine-growing districts the grape gleanings are the perquisite of the vintagers, and the grape gleaning was worth three casks of wine annually to the Tonsard family. Sheltered by local customs, they showed little conscience in their proceedings, finding their way into vineyards before the vintagers had done their work, just as they hurried into the cornfields where the sheaves stood waiting to be carted away. So, of the seven or eight hogsheads sold, one-half was cribbed, and fetched a better price. There was a certain amount of dead loss to be deducted in the budget, for Tonsard and his wife always ate of the best, and drank better liquor than they sold—supplied to them by their Soulanges correspondent in exchange for their own wines, but altogether, the money made by the united efforts of the family amounted to nine hundred francs or thereabout, for they fattened a couple of pigs every year—one for themselves, and one for sale.

As time went on the tavern became the favorite haunt of laborers and of all the scamps in the countryside; this was due partly to the talents of the Tonsard family, partly to the goodfellowship existing between them and the lowest class in the valley. Then both the girls were remarkably handsome, and walked in the ways of their mother; and finally, the Grand-I-Vert was such an old-established tavern (dating, as it did, from 1795) that it became an institution. From Conches to Ville-aux-Fayes the laborers came to conclude their bargains there, and to hear the news gathered by the Tonsard girls and Mouche and Fourchon, retailed by Ver-

michel or Brunet, the most renowned clerk of Soulanges, who came thither to find his practitioners.

The prices of hay and wine, day-work and piece-work, were fixed there; questions were referred to Tonsard's decision; and he, a sovereign judge in such matters, gave advice and drank with the rest. Soulanges, so the saying ran, was simply a fashionable place where people amused themselves; Blangy was the place for business, albeit eclipsed by the great metropolis of Ville-aux-Fayes, which in twenty-five years had come to be the capital of the magnificent valley. The grain and cattle market was held in the square at Blangy; the ruling prices there served as a guide for the whole district.

La Tonsard, being a keeper-at-home, was still plump and fair and young looking, when women who work in the fields fade as quickly as the field flowers, and are old crones at thirty. Moreover, La Tonsard liked to look her best. She was only neat and tidy, but in a village tidiness and neatness means luxury. The girls were dressed better than befitted their poverty, and followed their mother's example. Their bodices were almost elegant, and the linen beneath was finer than any that the richest peasant's wife wears. On high days and holidays they appeared in fine frocks, paid for Heaven only knows how. The servants at the Aigues let them have their cast-off clothing at a price within their reach; and gowns which had swept the pavements in Paris, altered to suit Marie and Catherine, were flaunted at the sign of the Grand-I-Vert. Neither of the girls, the gipsies of the valley, received a farthing from their parents, who merely boarded and lodged them, letting them lie in the loft at night on filthy mattresses, where the grandmother and two brothers slept as well, all huddled together in the hay like brutes. Neither father nor mother thought anything of this promiscuity. The age of iron and the age of gold have more resemblances than we think. Nothing arouses vigilance in the one, everything arouses it in the other, and for Society the result is apparently the same. The old woman's pres-

ence, which seemed to be less a safeguard than a necessity, only made matters worse.

The Abbe Brossette, after a close study of the state of things among his parishioners, made this profound remark to the Bishop:

"When you see how greatly they rely on their poverty, my lord, you can guess that these peasantry are in terror of losing their great excuse for their dissolute lives."

Everybody was aware how little the Tonsard family knew of scruples or principles, but nobody found any fault with their way of life.

At the outset of this *Scène* it must be explained, once for all, that the peasant's code is not the bourgeois code, and that in family life the peasants have no sort of delicacy. If a daughter is seduced, they do not take a moral tone unless the seducer is rich and can be frightened. Their children, until the State tears them away from their parents, are so much capital, or are made to conduce to their parents' comfort. Selfishness, more especially since 1789, is the one force that sets them thinking; they never ask whether such a thing is illegal or immoral, but what good it will do them.

Morality, which must not be confused with religion, begins with a competence, just as in still higher spheres delicacy flourishes in human nature as soon as fortune has gilded the surrounding furniture. An entirely honest and well-conducted peasant is an exception to his class. The curious will ask how this is, and here is the principal cause, one of many which might be advanced—The peasant's functions in the social scale bring him into close contact with nature; he lives a purely material life, very much like the life of a savage. The toil which exhausts the body leaves the mind stagnant, and this is especially the case with uneducated people. And, finally, their poverty is their *raison d'État*, and their necessity is to them a necessity, as the Abbe Brossette said.

Tonsard was ready to listen to the complaint of every one, and frauds useful to the needy were invented under his direction. The wife, a good-natured woman to all appearance,

helped evil-doers with a rancorous tongue, and never withheld her countenance or refused a helping-hand when anything against "the masters" was afoot. The tavern was a perfect nest of vipers, where the hatred which the proletariat and the peasantry bear to the rich and their employers was nursed and kept alive, venomous and active.

The Tonsards' prosperity was, in those times, the worst of examples. Every one asked himself why he should not help himself to wood as they did in the Forest of the Aigues, and find fuel for the oven and fagots for cold weather. Why should not every one else feed a cow on rich people's pastures, and have game enough to eat and to sell? Why should not they reap without sowing at harvest and vintage? Then the underhand theft, which robbed the woods and took tithes of the cornland, meadows, and vineyards, promptly came to be regarded as a vested interest in the communes of Blangy, Conches, and Cerneux, which encircled the Aigues. This canker, for reasons which will be explained in the proper place, was far worse on the Aigues estate than on the lands of Ronquerolles and Soulanges. Do not imagine that Tonsard, or his old mother, or wife or children, ever said in so many words, "We will steal our living, and we will do our thieving cleverly." The habits had formed slowly. The family began by mixing a few green boughs with the sticks; then, grown bold with habit, and purposely allowed to go unpunished (part of a scheme to be developed in the course of the story), in twenty years' time they had come to the point of "taking *their* wood," and making a living almost entirely by pilfering. The right of pasture for their cows, the abuse of the privileges of gleaning and grape-gleaning, had been established little by little in this way; and when once the Tonsards and the rest of the lazy peasants in the valley had felt the benefit of the four rights acquired by the poor in the country, rights pushed almost to spoliation, it may be imagined that they were not likely to relinquish them unless compelled by some force stronger than their audacity.

At the time when this story begins, Tonsard was about fifty years old. He was a tall, strong man, somewhat inclined to stoutness, with black woolly hair, and face of a startling hue, mottled with purplish streaks like a brick, yellow whites to his eyes, flapping ears with huge rims, a low flattened forehead, and hanging lip. A deceptive flabbiness of flesh covered the muscles beneath, and the man's true character was hidden under a certain stupidity enlightened by flashes of experience, which seemed the more like wit because, in the society of his father-in-law, he had learned a dialect called "chaff" in the dictionary of Messieurs Fourchon and Vermichel. Tonsard's nose was flattened at the end as if the finger of God had set a mark upon him; he spoke in consequence from the roof of the mouth, like those whom disease has disfigured by thickening of the nasal passages through which the breath passes with difficulty. His front teeth overlapped—a defect ominously significant, according to Lavater, and the more conspicuous because they were white as a dog's teeth. There was that in the man, beneath the veneer of an idle fellow's good humor and the easy-going ways of a tippling boor, which should have alarmed the least perspicacious.

Tonsard's portrait, the picture of his cabin, and the sketch of his father-in-law, seem to occupy a prominent position, but you may be sure that this place is due to the man, the tavern, and the family; for the life which has been so minutely described is a typical life, one of a hundred led by peasants in the valley; and although Tonsard was only a tool in the hands of a deeply rooted and energetic hate, he personally exercised an immense influence on the fortunes of the battle about to begin; he was the cave to which all that were discontented among the lowest class betook themselves; his tavern (as will shortly be seen) was over and over again the trysting-place of the party, even as he himself became the head of the movement, by reason of the terror which he inspired, less by what he actually did than by what people expected him to do. The poacher's threats

were quite as much dreaded as his action; he was never obliged to carry out a single one of them.

Every rebellion, open or covert, has its standard. The flag of marauders, idlers, and sots, therefore, was the redoubtable bush at the top of the pole by the gate of the Grand-I-Vert. People found it amusing in the tavern, and amusement is as much sought after and as hard to find in the country as in the town. There was no other inn, moreover, along twelve miles of road, a journey which loaded vehicles easily made in three hours, so all who came and went between Conches and Ville-aux-Fayes stopped at the tavern if only for a rest. Then the miller, the deputy-mayor of the arrondissement, came in now and then, and his lads came too; the General's servants did not despise the little wineshop, for Tonsard's two girls were an attraction, and so it fell out that through this subterranean connection with the château the Tonsards could learn all that they desired. It is impossible, by dint of benefits conferred or expected, to break the permanent alliance between servants and the people. The lackey comes from the people, and to the people he belongs. This ill-omened good-fellowship explains Charles's discreet choice of language at the foot of the flight of steps.

IV

ANOTHER IDYL

"*OH! LORD SAKES, DAD!*" cried Tonsard, at the sight of his father-in-law, who he suspected had come for a breakfast. "You are dry in the throat too early of a morning! We have nothing for you!—And how about that rope, the rope you were to make for us? It is a marvel how you work at it of an evening, and find so little done next morning. You ought to have twisted enough to twist your own neck with ages ago, for you are growing altogether too dear—"

(The wit of the peasant and laborer is of the exceedingly Attic kind, which consists in saying the thing that you really think with a certain grotesque exaggeration; nor is the wit of drawing-rooms essentially different; intellectual subtleties replace the picturesqueness of coarse, forcible language, that is all the difference.)

" 'Tisn't a father-in-law," the old man interrupted; "treat me as a customer. I want a bottle of the best."

So saying, Fourchon sat down, showing a five-franc piece that shone like a sun through his fingers as he rapped on the sorry table—a piece of furniture curious to behold by reason of its charred spots, wine stains, and notches covered with a coating of grease. At the sound of silver, Marie Tonsard, like a privateering corvette on a cruise, gave her grandfather a quick glance, a sly look that gleamed like a yellow spark in her blue eyes; and the jingling of the metal brought La Tonsard out of her room.

"You are always hard on poor father," said she, looking at Tonsard, "and yet he earns a good deal of money in a

year. God grant it is honestly come by!—Let us have a look at this," she added, and she pounced down on the coin, and snatched it out of old Fourchon's hands.

"Go, Marie," Tonsard said with gravity; "there is still some wine in bottle left under the shelf."

(In country places there is but one quality of wine, but it is sold under two names—wine from the cask, and wine in bottle.)

"Where did that come from?" La Tonsard demanded of her father, as she slipped the coin into her pocket.

"Philippine, you will come to a bad end," retorted her parent, shaking his head, without an attempt to recover his money. By this time, doubtless, Fourchon recognized the futility of a struggle between his terrible son-in-law, his daughter, and himself.

"There's one more bottle of wine for which you get five francs out of me," he added sarcastically, "but that shall be the last. I shall take my custom to the Cafe de la Paix."

"You be quiet, father," returned the fat, fair mistress of the house, who was rather like a Roman matron. "You want a shirt, a tidy pair of trousers, and another hat, and I should like to see you in a new waistcoat at last."

"I have told you before that that would be the ruin of me!" the old man shouted. "If people think I am rich, they won't give me anything."

The entrance of the fair-haired Marie with the bottle cut short old Fourchon's eloquence, for he did not lack that characteristic of an outspokenness which permits itself to say everything, and shrinks from giving no thought expression, however atrocious it may be.

"Then you have no mind to tell us where you bag so much money?" asked Tonsard. "Some of us might go there, I suppose—?"

The brutal master of the house, while finishing a snare, was eying his father-in-law. He scanned the old man's trousers, and soon spied the round edge of the second five-franc piece in his pocket.

"Here's to you!—I am turning capitalist," said old Fourchon.

"So you could, if you liked," said Tonsard; "you are clever enough, you are, only the devil made a hole in the bottom of your head, and everything runs down through it."

"Eh! I have been playing off the otter dodge on that young fellow from Paris up at the Aigues, that is all!"

"If many people were to come to see the source of the Avonne, you would be rich, Daddy Fourchon," said Marie.

"Yes," and he drank off the last glass of his bottle. "But I have played the otter dodge so often, that the otters are growing angry, and one ran between my legs, which will bring me twenty francs and more."

"You made an otter out of tow, daddy, I'll be bound," said La Tonsard, with a knowing look at the old man.

"If you give me a pair of trousers, a waistcoat, and a pair of list braces, so as I shan't be too much of a discredit to Vermichel on our platform at *The Tivoli* (for old Socquard is always grumbling at me), I will let you keep the money, daughter; your idea is quite worth it. I may take in that young fellow again; after this one try, he may very likely take to otter-hunting."

"Go and find us another bottle," said Tonsard, addressing his daughter.—"If your father had an otter, he would let us see it," he added, speaking to his wife. He hoped to rouse Fourchon's vanity.

"I am too much afraid of seeing her in your frying-pan," the old man said, and one little green eye winked at La Tonsard. "Philippine has just sneaked my five-franc piece, and how much haven't you bullied out of me for clothes and board, forsooth!—And you tell me that I am dry too early in the day, and I never have clothes to my back—"

"Because you sold your last suit to buy spiced wine at the Cafe de la Paix!" said his daughter; "and, proof of that, Vermichel tried to stop you—"

"Vermichel! After I stood treat! Vermichel is incapable of treachery to friendship. It will be that hundred-

weight of stale bacon on two legs that he is not ashamed to call his wife!"

"He or she," said Tonsard, "or Bonnébault—"

"If it was Bonnébault," retorted Fourchon, "him as is one of the pillars of the Cafe—I'll—I'll— That's enough!"

"But where's the harm if you did sell your things, old plate-licker? You sold them because you sold them; you are of age," returned Tonsard, slapping the old man's knee. "Come, give your custom to my barrels, redden your gullet; the missus's father has a right to do it, and better do that than carry your white silver to Socquard's."

"To think that you have played tunes for them to dance to at the Tivoli these fifteen years, and cannot find out how Socquard mulls his wine, you that are so cunning!" said his daughter, addressing her parent. "And yet you know quite well that with that secret we should be as rich as Rigou."

In the Morvan, and that strip of Burgundy which lies on the Paris side of the Morvan, the spiced wine with which La Tonsard reproached her father is a somewhat expensive beverage, which plays a great part in the lives of the peasants. Grocers compound it with more or less success, so do lemonade-makers where there are cafes. The delectable drink, composed of choice wine, sugar, cinnamon, and other spices, is much to be preferred to the multifarious mixtures and disguised forms of brandy known as ratafia, *cent-sept-ans*, *eau-des-braves*, cordial, vespetro, *esprit-de-soleil*, and the like. Spiced wine is to be found even on the very borders of Switzerland. In wild nooks in the Jura, where an occasional determined tourist penetrates, the innkeepers call it Wine of Syracuse, taking the word of commercial travellers. It is not bad in itself; and when mountain-climbing has induced a wolfish hunger, you are only too glad to pay the three or four francs charged for a bottle. In every household in Burgundy or the Morvan any trifling ailment or excitement is an excuse for drinking spiced wine. Women take it before and after a confinement with toast and sugar. Peasants have been known to squander their whole substance on spiced

wine, and not infrequently the too attractive liquor necessitates marital correction.

"There is no smoking that," said Fourchon. "Socquard always shuts himself up to make his spiced wine. He did not let his wife that's gone into the secret, and he has everything from Paris to make the stuff."

"Don't you tease your father," cried Tonsard. "He doesn't know—well and good, he doesn't know. One can't know everything."

Fourchon felt uneasy at this affability of speech and countenance on the part of his son-in-law.

"Be you minded to rob me?" the old man asked naïvely.

"*I've* nothing but what lawfully belongs to me," said Tonsard; "and when I take anything away from you, I am only helping myself to the portion you promised I should have."

The rough words reassured Fourchon. He bowed his head, like a man convicted and convinced.

"There's a fine springe," Tonsard continued, coming up to his father-in-law, and putting the trap on the old man's knees. "They will want game up at the Aigues, and we will supply them with some of their own, certain sure, or there is no Providence for us poor folk."

"You have made a good strong job of it," said the old man, surveying the deadly engine.

"Let us pick up a few pence at any rate, dad," said La Tonsard; "we shall have our slice of the loaf of the Aigues—"

"Babblers!" Tonsard broke in. "If I am hanged, it will not be for a gun-shot, but the clack of your daughter's tongue."

"Then do you think that the Aigues will be sold in lots, for the sake of your ugly phiz? What, old Rigou has been sucking the marrow out of your bones these thirty years, and you don't know that the bourgeois are worse than the seigneurs? When that affair comes off, those nobodies, the Soudrys, Gaubertins, and Rigous will set you dancing to

the tune of '*J'ai du bon tabac, tu n'en auras pas*,' the national anthem of the rich, eh? The peasant will always be the peasant. Don't you see (but you know nothing about politics) that Government puts on the wine-dues simply to do us out of our chink and keep us poor? The bourgeois or the Government, it is all one. What would become of them if we were all rich? Would they work in the fields? Would they do the harvesting?—They must have poor folk. I was rich for ten years, and I know quite well what I used to think about paupers!"

"You must hunt with them, all the same," said Tonsard, "because they break up the big estates into lots, and we can turn on Rigou afterward. He is eating up Courtecuisse; but if I were in Courtecuisse's place, poor fellow, I would have paid my shot in lead instead of silver, long ago—"

"Right you are," said Fourchon. "It is as old Niseron says, who kept on being a Republican after everybody else left off, 'The people die hard, the people don't die, they have time on their side!' "

The old man dropped into a kind of dream. Tonsard took advantage of this to take back his springe; but as he laid his hand upon it, he made a slit with a pair of scissors in the old man's trousers, and just as Fourchon raised his glass to drink, the five-franc piece slid down to a place on the floor that was always damp with the dregs of glasses. Tonsard set his foot on it. It was neatly done; yet the old man might perhaps have found it out if Vermichel had not turned up at that very moment.

"Tonsard!" called that functionary from the foot of the steps. "Where is your dad, do you know?"

Vermichel shouted, the coin was stolen, and the glass emptied simultaneously.

"Here, Captain!" said Fourchon, holding out a hand to help Vermichel up the steps.

You cannot imagine a type more thoroughly Burgundian than Vermichel. His countenance, not crimson but scarlet, like certain tropical portions of the globe, bore several con-

spicuous extinct volcanoes, and a greenish eruption, which Fourchon rather poetically called "grog blossoms." The features of this inflamed face had been swollen out of all knowledge through habitual drunkenness; it was a cyclopean visage, with an eye keen and wide awake on one side, but blind on the other, where the sight was obscured by a yellowish film. With a shock head of red hair, and a beard of the traditional Judas pattern, Vermichel's appearance was as formidable as his nature was harmless. His trumpet-like nose was a sort of note of interrogation, to which a huge slit of a mouth seemed to reply even when shut.

Vermichel was a little man. He wore iron-bound shoes, trousers of bottle-green velveteen, an ancient waistcoat so much mended that it looked like a bit of patchwork quilt, a rough blue cloth coat, and a broad-brimmed gray hat. This splendor of costume—demanded of him by his functions in the town of Soulanges, where he combined the offices of hall-porter at the town hall, town-crier, jailer, fiddler, and solicitor—was entirely due to the exertions of Mme. Vermichel, a terrible foe to Rabelaisian philosophy. This mustached virago, a good yard broad, seventeen stone in weight, and active in proportion to her size, bore rule over Vermichel; she beat him when he was drunk, and when he was sober he allowed her to beat him, for which reason old Fourchon cast contemptuous eyes on Vermichel's apparel—"The garb of a slave!" he used to call it.

"Talk of the sun and you see his rays," Fourchon continued, repeating an old joke occasioned by Vermichel's red beaming countenance, and indeed it was not unlike the gilded sun hung out for a sign above country inns. "Did your missus see too much dust on your jacket, and are you running away from your four-fifths? (for you can't call that wife of yours your better *half*). What brings you here so early, eh, beaten drum?"

"Politics as usual," said Vermichel; evidently he was used to these jokes.

"Oh! Business is flat at Blangy, and we shall have bills

protested directly," said old Fourchon, pouring out a glass for his friend.

"Our ape is on my tracks," said Vermichel, raising his glass.

In laborer's slang, the *ape* is the master. This was another expression in Messrs. Vermichel and Fourchon's dictionary.

"Why is Master Brunet coming to bother us up here?" demanded La Tonsard.

"Eh, goodness, you people have brought him in more than you are worth yourselves these three years.—Oh, the master up at the Aigues is going to pay you out properly. He is coming on well, is the Upholsterer.—As old Brunet says, 'If there were three like him in the valley, my fortune would be made—' "

"What have they been plotting fresh against the poor folk?" asked Marie.

"My word," answered Vermichel, "he is no fool, he isn't! You will have to knuckle under in the long run.—There is no help for it! They have been in force for the last two years, with their four gamekeepers and a mounted patrol all running about like ants, and a forester that works like a nigger. And now the police will do anything they like for them.—They will grind you down—"

"Not they!" said Tonsard; "we are too small already. It is not the trees as stands out longest, it's the grass."

"Don't you believe it," old Fourchon retorted; "you have land of your own—"

"After all," Vermichel went on, "those folk are very fond of you, for they think of you from morning to night. This is the sort of thing they say—'Those people pasture their cattle on our meadows, so we will take their cattle away from them, and then they cannot eat the grass in our meadows themselves.' As one and all of you have judgments hanging over you, they have given orders to our *ape* to seize your cows. We are going to begin with Conches; this morning we shall seize Mother Bonnébault's cow, Godain's cow, Mitant's cow—"

As soon as Marie heard the name of Bonnébault, she looked knowingly at her father and mother, and darted out of the house and into the vineyard; she was Bonnébault's sweetheart, and the old woman with the cow was Bonnébault's grandmother. She slipped like an eel through a hole in the hedge, and fled away to Conches with the speed of a hare with the hounds on her track.

"They will do this much," said Tonsard placidly; "they will get their bones broken, and that will be a pity, for their mothers won't find them new ones."

"That may very well happen, all the same," assented Fourchon.—"But look here, Vermichel, I can't come with you for an hour yet; I have important business at the château."

"More important than three fees of five sous each? You had better not quarrel with your own bread and butter."

"My business lies at the Aigues, I tell you, Vermichel," said old Fourchon, with ludicrous self-importance.

"Besides, suppose that father had better be out of the way," said La Tonsard. "Now, maybe you would mean to look for the cows?" she queried.

"M. Brunet is a good soul; if he finds nothing but the cow-dung, he will ask no better," answered Vermichel. "A man like him, that has to go about the roads of a night, ought to mind what he is about."

"If he does, he is right," Tonsard said dryly.

"So he talks like this to M. Michaud," Vermichel went on. "'I shall go as soon as the court rises.' If he really meant to find the cows, he would have gone to-morrow morning at seven o'clock. But there, go he must, M. Brunet. You won't catch Michaud napping twice; he is an old dog, and up to everything. Ah, there's a ruffian for you!"

"A bully like that ought to have stopped in the army," said Tonsard; "he is only fit to let loose on the enemy. I wish he would come here, I know, and ask me my name; he may call himself a veteran of the Young Guard as much

as he pleases, sure am I that after we measured our spurs, I'd pull more feathers out of the old cock than he would have out of me."

"Oh, by the by," said La Tonsard, turning to Vermichel, "there are the advertisements of the Fête at Soulanges, when will they be out? Here we are at the 8th of August."

"I took them yesterday to the printer, M. Bournier at Ville-aux-Fayes," said Vermichel.—"There was talk at Ma'am Soudry's of fireworks on the lake."

"What a lot of people we shall have!" cried Fourchon.

"And the takings of days together for Socquard," said Tonsard enviously.

"Oh, perhaps it will rain," added his wife, as if to reassure herself.

The sound of horse hoofs came from the direction of Soulanges, and five minutes later the clerk of the court tied his horse to a stake set for that purpose by the wicket-gate, near the cowshed. He soon showed his face at the door.

"Come, come, boys, let us lose no time," cried he, with a pretence of hurry.

"Ha!" said Vermichel, "here's a deserter for you, M. Brunet. Daddy Fourchon wants to drop out of this business."

"He has had a drop too much," retorted the clerk, "but the law does not require him to be sober."

"Asking your pardon, M. Brunet," said Fourchon, "I am expected at the Aigues on business; there is a bargain for an otter on hand."

Brunet was a little dried-up man, dressed in black cloth from head to foot. With his bilious complexion, sly eyes, crisp hair, firm mouth, pinched nose, fidgety manner, and hoarse voice, his whole appearance and character exactly suited his profession. So well versed was he in law, or, rather, in chicanery, that he was at once the adviser and the terror of the canton; and, moreover, he did not lack a certain kind of popularity among the peasants, of whom, for

the most part, he took payment in kind. All his positive and negative qualities, together with his knowledge of their ways, had brought him a practice in the district, to the prejudice of his colleague, Maître Plissoud, of whom more will be said later on. It not infrequently happens in country places that one clerk of the peace does all the business, and the other has none.

"Then is there any hurry?" asked Tonsard of little Brunet.

"There is no help for it! You are plundering that man beyond everything, and it's in self-defence," said the clerk. "This whole business of yours will end badly; the Government will take it up."

"So we poor wretches are to die like dogs, are we?" asked Tonsard, bringing out a glass of brandy on a saucer for the clerk.

"The poor may die like dogs, there will always be plenty left," said Fourchon sententiously.

"And then you do more damage than a little in the woods," pursued the man of law.

"Don't you believe it, M. Brunet; there is a good deal of noise made about a few miserable fagots, that there is!" said La Tonsard.

"They did not clear away enough rich people at the time of the Revolution, that is all," said Tonsard.

As he spoke a sound was heard, alarming in that it was inexplicable. A sound of footsteps at a furious pace, the rattle of arms rising above a crackling sound of brushwood dragged along the ground, and a patter of feet that fled faster than the pursuer. Two voices as different as the footsteps bawled interjections. The group in the tavern knew that it was a man in hot chase and a woman in flight, but why and wherefore? The suspense did not last long.

"That's mother," remarked Tonsard, starting up; "I know her squall."

And in another moment, after springing up the broken steps with a final effort such as smugglers' legs alone can

make, Granny Tonsard fell backward, sprawling in their midst. The huge mass of wood and sticks in her fagot made a terrific amount of noise as it bent and broke against the lintel and the ceiling. Every one whisked out of her way. Tables, bottles, and chairs were overturned in all directions as the branches fell about; the whole cabin might have fallen in with a less mighty crash.

"He has killed me, the scamp! the shock has killed me—"

Then the old woman's shriek, flight, and sudden entrance were all explained by an apparition on the threshold; there stood a man dressed in green cloth from head to foot, his hat bound with a silver cord, a sabre at his side, and the crest of Montcornet and Troisville stamped on his shoulder belt; he wore the regulation soldier's red waistcoat and leather gaiters reaching just above the knee.

It was a forester. There was a moment's hesitation; then the man exclaimed, as he saw Brunet and Vermichel, "I have witnesses!"

"Of what?" asked Tonsard.

"That woman has an oak ten years old, chopped into billets, in her fagot. Downright stealing!"

As soon as the word "witness" was pronounced, Vermichel considered that the moment was eminently suitable for going into the croft to take the air.

"Witnesses of what? Of what?" cried Tonsard, planting himself in front of the forester, while La Tonsard raised her prostrate mother-in-law. "Have the goodness to show me a clean pair of heels, Vatel! Pounce on people and draw up your reports on the highway where you are on your own ground, you brigand, but get out of this. My house belongs to me, I suppose. A man's house is his castle—"

"I caught your mother in the act, and she will come along with me."

"Arrest my mother in my house! You have no right to do it! My house is inviolable, every one knows that much at least. Have you a magistrate's warrant from M. Guerbet?

Ah! that is what the police must have before they come into the house, and you are not a policeman, though you may have taken your oath at the court to make us die of hunger, you pitiful forest catch-poll."

The forester's rage rose to such a pitch that he tried to seize on the fagot; but the old hag, a hideous, dirty bit of parchment endowed with life, such as you will not see save in David's picture of the *Sabines*, yelled, "If you touch that, I'll go for your eyes."

"Look here, I dare you to undo the fagot before M. Brunet," said the forester.

Although the clerk assumed the air of indifference which officials learn to wear in experience of affairs, he looked at the host and his wife, and blinked in a way which meant, "This is a bad business!"

As for old Fourchon, he pointed to the heap of ashes on the hearth, and looked at his daughter. In a moment La Tonsard grasped the situation, her mother-in-law's peril, and her father's mute counsel; she snatched up a handful of ashes, and dashed it full in the forester's eyes. Vatel began to yell. Tonsard, illuminated by all the light of which the other was bereft, pushed him roughly out onto the steps, where a blind man might easily miss his footing. Vatel rolled down into the road, and dropped his gun. In the twinkling of an eye the fagot was unbound, the logs extracted, and hidden with nimbleness which no words can describe. Brunet, having no mind to be a witness to an exploit which he had foreseen, hurried out to the forester's assistance, picked him up, set him on the bank, and went to soak his handkerchief in water, so as to bathe the sufferer's eyes; for, in spite of the pain, the man was trying to drag himself toward the brook.

"Vatel, you are in the wrong," said the clerk. "You have no right to enter a house, you know—"

On the threshold stood the old woman, a dwarfish, almost hunchbacked figure; lightnings flashed from her eyes, while insults poured from her tongue; the toothless crone foamed

at the mouth, standing with her hands on her hips, yelling so loud that they might have heard her at Blangy.

"Ah! scamp, serves you right, it does! Hell confound you! Suspect me of cutting trees, *me* the honestest woman in the place, and hunt me down like vermin! I should like to see you lose your cursed eyes! and then there would be peace again in the countryside. You bring bad luck, every one of you, you and your mates, making up shameful stories to stir up strife between your master and us—"

The forester submitted while the justice's clerk cleared the ashes from his eyes, and bathed them, demonstrating all the while that his patient had put himself in the wrong as to the law.

"The harridan! She had tired us out," Vatel said at last; "she has been in the wood ever since it was light—"

Meanwhile the stolen goods were concealed, the whole family lent a hand, and in a trice everything in the tavern was in its place again. This done, Tonsard came to the door and took a high and mighty tone.

"Vatel, sonny, the next time you take it into your head to force your way into my house, my gun will have something to say to you. You have had the ashes this time, you may catch a sight of the fire next. You don't know your business.—You are feeling warm after this; if you would like a glass of wine, they'll bring one for you; you can see for yourself if there is a scrap of live wood in my mother's fagot, it is all sticks."

"Scum of the earth!" ejaculated the forester for Brunet's benefit, more hurt in his mind by that piece of irony than by the ashes in his eyes.

Just at that moment Charles, the man who had been sent in search of Blondet, appeared at the gate.

"Why, what is the matter, Vatel?" cried he.

"Oh!" answered the forester, drying his eyes, which he had been dipping wide open in the stream for a final cleansing, "I have some debtors up there; I will make them curse the day when they first saw the light."

"If that is the way you take it, Monsieur Vatel," said Tonsard coolly, "you will find out that we Burgundians are no milksops."

Vatel went off. Charles, but little curious to know the meaning of the enigma, looked in at the tavern door.

"Come up to the château, you and your otter, if you have one," said he to old Fourchon.

The old man hastily rose and followed Charles.

"Look here now, where is that otter of yours?" asked Charles, smiling incredulously.

"Over here," said the other, turning toward the Thune. The Thune was a little stream formed by the overflow of the millstream and the rivulets in the park at the Aigues. The Thune flows by the side of the road until it reaches the little lake at Soulanges, pouring into it on one side, and out at the other, turning the mills at Soulanges, filling the ponds by the château, and finally joining the Avonne again.

"There she is. I hid her in the bottom of the stream at the Aigues with a stone tied to her neck."

As the old man stooped and raised himself again, he missed the five-franc piece from his pocket; such a coin was there so seldom that he missed the novel sensation at once.

"Oh! the rascals!" he cried, "I snare otters, and they snare their father, they do! They take all that I make from me, and tell me that it is for my benefit. Oh, I believe them, when they talk about my benefit. If it weren't for poor Mouche, the comfort of my old age, I would go and drown myself. Children are the ruin of their fathers.—You are not married, are you, Monsieur Charles? Never marry, and then you won't have to repent of breeding bad blood. And I thinking that now I could buy some tow! There's my tow slipped through my fingers. That gentleman, and a nice gentleman he is, gave me ten francs. Well, for one thing, my otter has gone up in value now since this happened."

Charles put so little belief in Daddy Fourchon that he took these lamentations, which for once were full of a very real feeling, for part of the preparation of a "try on," as

he called it, in the language of the servants' hall, and he made a blunder by betraying his opinion in a smile, which the spiteful old man saw at once.

"Look here, Daddy Fourchon, you must behave yourself, eh? You will speak to madame in a moment," said Charles, who noticed the profusion of brilliant carbuncles on the old man's nose and cheeks.

"I know what I am about, Charles, as you shall see. And if you will undertake to give me some of the scraps left over from breakfast, and a couple of bottles of Spanish wine in the kitchen, I will tell you in three words how to escape a drubbing—"

"Tell me, and François shall have the master's orders to give you a glass of wine," said the footman.

"Is it a bargain?"

"A bargain."

"All right. You shall have a word or two with Catherine under the bridge over the Avonne. Godain is in love with her, he has seen you together, and he is stupid enough to be jealous. Stupid, I say, because a peasant has no business with sentiment, that is for rich people. So if you go to Soulanges for a dance with her at the Tivoli on the *fête* day, you will be made to dance more than you think for! Godain is miserly, and has a nasty temper; he is just the one to break your arm, and you could not summons him for it—"

"Too dear! Catherine is a fine girl, but she is not worth *that*," said Charles. "And what makes Godain take it amiss? The others don't."

"Oh! he is enough in love with her to marry her."

"There is a woman that will be beaten!" said Charles.

"That is as may be," returned the grandfather. "Tonsard never lifted a hand against her mother, so frightened he was that she should go off and leave him, and Catherine takes after her mother. A wife that can bestir herself is worth a good deal.—And besides, at a game of hot cockles with Catherine, Godain, strong though he is, would not come off best."

"Wait, Daddy Fourchon, here are forty sous for you to drink to my health in case we mayn't be able to get a sup of Alicante."

Old Fourchon looked away as he pocketed the money, lest Charles should see the ironical glee in his eyes, which he could not hide.

"Catherine is a rare wench for a glass," said the old man; "she is fond of malaga; you ought to tell her to come to the Aigues for some, you ninny!"

Charles looked at old Fourchon with undisguised admiration; how should he guess how immensely important it was to the General's enemies to introduce one more spy into the house.

"The General must be pleased," the old man went on; "the peasants are keeping very quiet. What does he say about it? Is he still quite satisfied with Sibilet?"

"Nobody gives Sibilet any trouble except Michaud; they say he will contrive to make him lose his place."

"Two of a trade!" commented old Fourchon. "I'll lay to it that you yourself would be glad to see François turned off to step into his place."

"Lord, François gets twelve hundred francs," said Charles; "but they won't turn him away, he knows the General's secrets—"

"Just as Ma'am Michaud knew my lady's, eh?" said Fourchon, eying Charles keenly. "Look here, my lad, do you know whether the General and my lady have rooms apart?"

"Of course, or the master would not be so fond of madame as he is."

"Don't you know any more?" asked Fourchon, but no more could be said, for by this time the pair were under the kitchen windows.

V

THE ENEMIES FACE TO FACE

AS SOON AS BREAKFAST was begun, François, the first valet-de-chambre, came to Blondet, saying in a low voice, but quite loud enough to be overheard by the Count, "Fourchon's little boy says that they caught the otter at last, sir, and he wants to know if you would like to have the animal before taking it to the sub-prefect at Ville-aux-Fayes."

Émile Blondet, past master in mystification, flushed red in spite of himself, like a girl who hears an equivocal anecdote, and understands the drift of it.

"Aha! you have been out otter-hunting with old Fourchon this morning!" cried the General, bursting into a roar of laughter.

"What is it?" asked the Countess, disconcerted by her husband's hilarity.

"When a clever man like Blondet lets old Fourchon take him in, an old Cuirassier need not blush to have gone hunting that same otter, who looks uncommonly like the third horse which you never see and always pay for when you travel post."

And in a voice broken by peals of laughter, the General managed to add, "After that I do not wonder that you changed your boots and trousers, you must have been made to swim.—As for me, I was not hoaxed quite so far as you —I stopped on the bank—but then you are so much cleverer than I am—"

"You forget, dear, that I do not know what you are talking about," put in Mme. de Montcornet, with a trace of pique,

caused by Blondet's confusion. At this the General recovered his gravity, and Blondet himself told the story of his otter hunt.

"But if they really have an otter," said the Countess, "they are not so much to blame, poor things."

"Yes; only no one has seen the otter for these ten years!" returned the pitiless General.

"M. le Comte," said François, "the child vows and declares that he has caught one—"

"If they have an otter, I will pay them for it," said the General.

"Providence can never have condemned the Aigues to be without otters forever," put in the Abbe Brossette.

"Oh, M. le Cure, if you let loose Providence upon us—" exclaimed Blondet.

"But who can have come?" the Countess asked quickly.

"Mouche, my lady, the little boy that always goes about with old Fourchon," the servant answered.

"Send him in—if madame has no objection," said the General. "He will perhaps amuse you."

"But at any rate we ought to know what to believe, ought we not?" asked the Countess.

A few moments later Mouche appeared in his almost naked condition. At this apparition of poverty personified in the splendid dining-room, when the price of a single mirror on the walls would have been a fortune to the barefooted, bare-legged, bare-headed child, it was impossible not to give way to charitable impulses. Mouche's eyes, like glowing coals, gazed from the glories of the room to the riches on the table.

"You have no mother, of course?" said the Countess, unable to explain such destitution in any other way.

"No, my lady; mammy died of fretting because daddy went for a soldier in 1812, and she never saw him again; he did not marry her with the papers before he went, and he was frozen, saving your presence. But I have my grandad Fourchon, who is very good to me, though he does beat me now and again like a Jesus."

"How does it happen, dear, that any one on your land is so wretched?" asked the Countess, looking at the General.

"No one need be wretched here, Madame la Comtesse, unless they choose," said the cure. "M. le Comte means well by them, but you have to do with a people without religion, people who have but one idea—how to live at your expense."

"But, my dear cure," said Blondet, "you are here to keep them in order."

"My lord Bishop sent me here as a missionary among heathen, monsieur," said the Abbe Brossette; "but as I had the honor of pointing out to him, our heathen in France are unapproachable; they make it a rule not to listen to us; now in America you can appeal to the savages."

"M'sieu le Cure, they do a little for me now, but if I went to your church they would give over helping me altogether. I should have them calling 'shovel hats' after me."

"But religion ought to begin by giving him trousers, my dear Abbe," said Blondet. "Do not your missions begin by coaxing the savage?"

"He would have sold his clothes before long," the Abbe answered, lowering his voice, "and my stipend does not allow me to traffic in souls in that way."

"M. le Cure is right," said the General, who was looking at Mouche. The urchin's tactics consisted in feigning ignorance whenever he had the worst of it.

"The little rascal is evidently intelligent enough to know right from wrong," continued the General. "He is old enough to work, and his one thought is how to transgress and escape punishment. He is well known to the foresters. Before I was mayor he knew, young as he was, that if a man is witness of a trespass on his own land, he cannot lodge a complaint himself, and he would brazenly stay in my meadows grazing his cows under my eyes; now, he makes off."

"Oh! that is very wrong," said the Countess; "we ought not to take other people's goods, dear child."

"One must eat, my lady. Grandad gives me more cuffs than crusts, and it makes you feel hollow inside, does a hiding. When the cows have milk, I help myself to a little, and that keeps life in me. Is his lordship so poor that he can't spare a little grass so that I may drink?"

"Why, perhaps he has had nothing to eat to-day," said the Countess, touched by such dire poverty. "Just let him have some bread and the rest of the fowl; give him some breakfast, in fact," she said, looking at the servant.—"Where do you sleep?" she added.

"Anywhere, wherever they will let us sleep in the winter, my lady, and out of doors in the summer."

"How old are you?"

"Twelve."

"Then something might be made of him yet," said the Countess, turning to her husband.

"Might make a soldier," said the General gruffly; "he is in good training for it. I myself have been through quite as much of that sort of thing as he has, and yet here I am."

"Asking your pardon, General, I am not on the register," said the child. "I shall not be drawn. My poor mother was not married, and I was born out in the fields; I am a son of the *airth*, as grandad says. Mammy saved me from the militia. I don't call myself Mouche any more than anything else. Grandad showed me plainly where I was well off. The Government haven't got me on their *papers*, and when I am old enough to be drawn I shall go on my travels through France. They won't catch *me!*"

"Do you love your grandfather?" asked the Countess, trying to read the heart of twelve years old.

"Lord, he cuffs me whenever the fit takes him, but there is no help for it. He is so funny, such a good sort! And then he says that he is taking pay for teaching me to read and write."

"Can you read?" asked the Count.

"I should think I could, M. le Comte, and fine writing too! true as it is that we have an otter!"

"What is this?" the Count asked, holding out a newspaper.

"The *Cu-o-ti-dienne*," pronounced Mouche, without stumbling more than three times over the word. Everybody, even the Abbe Brossette, joined in the laugh that followed.

"Well," cried Mouche sulkily, "you are setting me to read them newspapers, and grandad says that they are written for rich people, but you always get to know later on what there is inside them."

"The child is right, General; he makes me long to meet the man who got the better of me this morning once again," said Blondet; "I see that there was a touch of Mouche in his hoax."

Mouche understood perfectly well that he was there for the master's amusement. Old Fourchon's scholar showed himself worthy of his master; he began to cry.

"How can you make fun of a barefooted child?" asked the Countess.

"A child who thinks it quite natural that his grandfather should take his pay for his schooling in slaps?" asked Blondet.

"Poor little one, look here," said the lady; "have you caught an otter?"

"Yes, my lady, as true as that you are the prettiest lady I have seen or ever shall see," said the child, wiping away his tears.

"Just let us see this otter," said the General.

"Oh, M'sieu le Comte, grandad hid her away; but she was still kicking when we were at the ropewalk. You can send for my grandad, for he wants to sell her himself."

"Take him to the kitchen and give him his breakfast, and send Charles for old Fourchon meanwhile," the Countess bade François. "And see if you can find some shoes and trousers and a jacket for the boy. Those who come here naked must go away again clothed—"

"God bless you, dear lady," said Mouche as he went.

"M'sieu le Cure may be sure that the clothes *you* give me will be laid up for high days and holidays."

Émile and Mme. de Montcornet exchanged glances. This last remark surprised them. "That boy is not so silly," their looks seemed to tell the cure.

"Certainly, madame," said the cure as soon as the boy had gone, "you cannot call a reckoning with poverty. To my thinking, the poor have justifications which God alone can see and take into account, justifications in physical causes which often produce baleful results, and other justifications springing from character, produced by tendencies, blameworthy as we think, but yet the result of qualities which, unfortunately for society, find no outlet. The miracles worked on battlefields have taught us that the lowest scoundrel may have the makings of a hero in him. . . . But here you are placed in a very unusual position; and if reflection does not keep pace with benevolence, you run the risk of subsidizing your enemies—"

"*Enemies?*" echoed the Countess.

"Bitter enemies," the General spoke gravely.

"Old Fourchon and his son-in-law Tonsard represent the whole intelligence of the poorest folk in the valley; their advice is asked and taken in the most trifling matters. Their Machiavelism reaches an incredible pitch. You may take this for granted, that ten peasants in a wineshop are the small change for a big intrigue—"

As he was speaking, François announced M. Sibilet.

"This is the minister of finance," said the General, smiling; "send him in.—He will explain the gravity of the situation to you," he added, glancing from his wife to Blondet.

"And so much the better in that he will scarcely make the least of it," said the cure, in a scarcely audible voice.

Blondet saw for the first time a personage whose acquaintance he wished to make—the steward of the Aigues, of whom he had heard much since his arrival. Sibilet was a man of thirty or thereabout; he was of middle height, with a sullen, unpleasant face, which a laugh seemed to suit ill. The eyes

of changing green, under an anxious brow, looked different ways, and thus disguised his thoughts. His long, straight hair gave him a somewhat clerical appearance; he wore a brown great-coat and a black waistcoat and trousers; he was knock-kneed, and the trousers imperfectly concealed this defect. In spite of his unwholesome appearance, sallow complexion, and flabby muscles, Sibilet had a strong constitution. The somewhat gruff tones of his voice harmonized with the generally unprepossessing appearance of the man.

Blondet and the Abbé Brossette exchanged a furtive glance, and in the fleeting expression in the eyes of the young ecclesiastic Blondet read the confirmation of his own suspicions.

"You set down the peasants' thefts at about one-fourth the value of the yearly returns, do you not, my dear Sibilet?" asked the General.

"At a good deal more than that, M. le Comte," returned the steward. "Your paupers take more than the Government asks of you. There is a young rogue called Mouche who gleans his two bushels per day; and old women, whom any one would think at their last gasp, will recover health and youth and the use of their limbs at harvest-time. That is a phenomenon which you can see for yourself," continued Sibilet, turning to Blondet, "for we shall begin in six days' time; the rain in July has made the harvest late this year. We shall be cutting the rye next week. Nobody ought to glean without a certificate of poverty from the mayor of the commune, and a commune ought on no account to allow any but the very poor to glean at all, but all the communes in the district glean over each other without certificates. For sixty poor people in the commune, there are forty more who will not do a day's work; and, as a matter of fact, even those who have set up for themselves will leave their work to glean in the fields or the vineyards.

"Here these folk will pick up three hundred bushels a day among them, and the harvest lasts a fortnight—four thousand five hundred bushels taken away in the canton.

So the gleaning amounts to about one-tenth of the whole harvest; and as to the abuse of grazing, that makes a hole in our profits, about a sixth of the value of our meadows goes in that way. Then there are the woods, they do incalculable mischief there, cutting down the young saplings six years old.—The damage done to your estate, M. le Comte, mounts up to twenty and some odd thousand francs per annum."

"Well, madame," said the General, "do you hear that?"

"Is it not exaggerated?" asked Mme. de Montcornet.

"No, unhappily it is not, madame," said the cure. "There is poor Father Niseron, the white-haired old man who unites in person all the offices of bellringer, beadle, sexton, sacristan, and chanter, in spite of his republican opinions—in fact, he is the grandfather of that little Geneviève whom you placed under Mme. Michaud—"

"La Péchina!" said Sibilet, interrupting the Abbe.

"La Péchina?" asked the Countess. "What do you mean?"

"Mme. la Comtesse, when you saw little Geneviève by the wayside looking so forlorn, you exclaimed in Italian: *Piccina!* And now it has become a nickname, and so corrupted that the whole commune knows your protégée by the name of the *Péchina*. She is the only one who comes to church, poor little thing, with Mme. Michaud and Mme. Sibilet," added the cure.

"Yes, and she is none the better off for that," said the steward. "She is persecuted for her religion."

"Well," continued the cure, "this poor old man of seventy-two picks up a bushel and a half in a day, and does it honestly moreover, but he is too conscientious to sell his gleanings as the rest of them do; he keeps the corn for his own consumption. As a favor to me, M. Langlume, your deputy, grinds his corn for nothing, and my servant bakes his bread with mine."

"I had forgotten my little protégée," said the Countess, startled by Sibilet's remarks.—"Your coming has put other

things out of my head," she added, turning to Blondet. "But after breakfast we will go to the Avonne gate, and I will show you a living woman like a fifteenth century painter's dream."

As she spoke, a pair of cracked sabots was put down with a clatter at the kitchen door, and old Fourchon was announced by François. The Countess nodded permission, and François brought the old man into the room, Mouche following behind with his mouth full, and holding the otter by a string tied to its yellow paws, ribbed like a duck's foot. Old Fourchon glanced at the gentry seated at table, gave Sibilet the half-defiant, half-servile look that veils a peasant's thoughts: then he brandished the amphibian triumphantly.

"Here she is!" he cried, looking at Blondet.

"That is my otter though," demurred the Parisian; "I paid plenty for it."

"Oh, your otter got away, my dear sir!" retorted old Fourchon. "She is in her hole at this minute; she had no mind to come out of it; she was the female, while this here is the male! Mouche saw it come out, a long way off, after you had gone. 'Tis as true as that M. le Comte covered himself with glory along with his Cuirassiers at Waterloo! The otter is as much mine as the Aigues belongs to his lordship the General. . . . But for twenty francs the otter is yours, otherwise I will take it to our *sub-perfect*. If M. Gourdon thinks it too dear, as we went hunting together this morning, I give the gentleman from Paris the preference, as is but fair."

"Twenty francs!" put in Blondet. "In plain French, that is not exactly what you might call giving me the preference."

"Eh! my dear sir," cried the old man, "I know so little French, that if you like I will ask you for them in Burgundian; it's all one to me so long as I get the francs, I will speak Latin: *latinus*, *latina*, *latinum*. After all, it is only what you promised me yourself this morning; and besides, my children have taken your money from me already; I cried

about it as I came along. You ask Charles—I don't like to summons them for ten francs and publish their bad doings at the court. As soon as I make a few sous they get them away from me by making me drink.—It is hard that I can't go to take a glass of wine in my own daughter's house, but that is what children are in these days!—That is what comes of the Revolution; it's everything for the children now, and their fathers are put upon. Ah! I am eddicating Mouche here in quite another way. The little rapscallion is fond of me," he remarked, administering a slap to his grandson.

"It looks to me as if you were making him into a petty thief, just like the rest of them," said Sibilet, "for he never lies down without something on his conscience."

"Oh! Master Sibilet, his conscience is easier than what yours is! . . . Poor child, what does he take? A trifle of grass, that is better than throttling a man! Lord, he doesn't know mathematics like you; he doesn't understand subtraction and addition and multiplication. . . . You do us a lot of harm, you do! You tell people that we are a pack of brigands, and you are at the bottom of the division between his lordship there, who is a good man, and the rest of us, who are good folk. There ain't a better place than this is.

"Look here! Have we money coming in? Don't we go without clothes to our backs, as you may say, Mouche and I? Fine sheets we sleep in, bleached in the dew every morning; and unless you grudge us the air we breathe, and the light of the sun, and our drink, there is nothing that I see that any one can want to take from us! The bourgeois do their robberies in the chimney corner, and it pays much better than picking up things that lie about in corners of the wood. There are no foresters nor mounted keepers for Master Gaubertin, who came here bare as a worm, and has two million francs this day.

"'Thieves!' is soon said; but there is old Guerbet, as collects the taxes, has gone out of our villages at night with his receipts these fifteen years, and nobody has ever asked him for two farthings. That is not the way in a country of

thieves. We are not much the richer for theft. Just show me this—whether it is we or you who live by doing nothing?"

"If you had not been idle, you would have something to live on," said the cure. "God blesses work."

"I don't like to contradict you, Môsieur l'Abbe, for you know more than I do, and perhaps you can explain this to me. Here am I, am I not? A lazy, idle sot, a good-for-nothing of an old Fourchon, who has had some education, has been a farmer, fell into difficulties, and never got out of them! . . . Well, now, where is the difference between me and that good, honest old man Niseron, a vinedresser, seventy years old (for he and I are of an age), who has been digging the soil? up before daylight every morning to go to his work, till he has a body like iron and a noble soul. I see that he is just as poor as I am. There is La Pechina, his granddaughter, gone out to service with Ma'am Michaud, while my little Mouche is free as the air! Is the poor old man rewarded for his virtues in the same way that I am punished for my vices? He does not know what a glass of wine is; he is as sober as an apostle; he digs graves for the dead, and I set the living a-dancing. He has dined with Duke Humphrey, while I have tippled down the liquor like a rollicking devil-may-care creature. And one has come just as far as the other; we have the same snow on our heads, the same cash in our pockets, he rings the bell, and I make the rope. He is a Republican, and I am a sinner, and not even a publican. Let the peasant do ill or well, according to your notions, he will end as he began, in rags, and you in fine linen—"

Nobody interrupted old Fourchon, who seemed to owe his eloquence to the bottled wine; at the outset Sibilet tried to cut him short, but at a sign from Blondet the steward was dumb. The cure, the General, and the Countess gathered from the journalist's glances that he wished to study the problem of pauperism from the life, and perhaps to be quits with old Fourchon.

"And what do you mean about Mouche's education?

How do you set to work to bring him up to be a better child to you than your daughters?"

"Does he so much as speak to him of God?" asked the cure.

"Oh! not I, Môsieur le Cure, I be'ant telling him to fear God, but *men*. God is good, and has promised, according to you parsons, that we shall have the kingdom of heaven, as the rich keep the kingdom of earth. I say to him—'Mouche! fear the jail! for you go out of jail to the scaffold. Never steal anything; make them give you what you want! Stealing leads to murder, and murder brings down the justice of men on you. The razor of justice—that is to be feared; it secures the rich man's slumber against the poor man that lies awake. Learn to read. Education will put it in your power to make money under cover of the law, like clever M. Gaubertin. You will be a steward, eh! like M. Sibilet, whom his lordship the Count allows his rations. The great thing is to keep well with the rich; there are crumbs under rich men's tables. That is what I call a fine education, and thorough too. So the young whelp keeps on this side of the law. He will be a steady boy; he will take care of me!"

"And what will you make of him?" inquired Blondet.

"A gentleman's servant, to begin with," answered Fourchon, "because seeing the masters from near, his education will be thoroughly finished, that it will! Good example will teach him to make his way with the law to back him like the rest of you! . . . If his lordship will take him into his stables to learn to rub down the horses, the little fellow will be very much pleased—seeing that, though he fears men, he is not afraid of animals."

"You are a clever man, Daddy Fourchon," began Blondet. "You know quite well what you are saying, and there is some sense in what you say."

"Oh! my certy! no, I have left my senses at the Grand-I-Vert along with my two five-franc pieces."

"How came such a man as you to drift into such poverty? For as things are now, a peasant has only himself to thank

if he does badly; he is free, he can become rich. It is not as it used to be any longer. If a peasant can scrape a little money together, he finds a bit of land, he can buy it, and he is his own master."

"I saw the old times, and I see the new, my dear learned sir," replied Fourchon; "they have put up a new signboard, but the liquor is the same as ever. To-day is only yesterday's younger brother. There! you put that in your paper! Enfranchised, are we? We still belong to the same village, and the *seigneur* is there still; I call him Hard Labor.—The hoe, which is all our property, has not passed out of our hands. And anyhow, whether we work for the *seigneur* or for the tax collector, who takes the best part of what we make, we have to sweat our lives out—"

"But why not choose a handicraft and try your luck elsewhere?" asked Blondet.

"Are you talking to me of setting out to seek my fortune? —But where should I go? I must have a passport, which costs forty sous, before I can go out of the department. These forty years I have not been able to hear a slut of a two-franc piece jangle with another in my pocket. If you go straight before you, for every village you come to you want a three-franc piece, and there are not many of the Fourchon family that have the wherewithal to visit six villages! Nothing drags us from our communes except the conscription. And what does the army do for us? The colonel lives on the common soldier as the master lives on the laborer. Does one colonel out of a hundred spring from our loins? In the army, as in the rest of the world, for one that grows rich a hundred drop out. For want of what? God knows—so do the money-lenders.

"So the best thing we can do is to stop in our communes, where we are penned up like sheep by the force of circumstances, just as we used to be by the *seigneurs*. And I care not a rap who nails me here. Nailed down by necessity, or nailed down by the nobles, we are condemned for life to labor on the soil. Wherever we are, we turn up the soil, and dig

it and dung it, and work for you that are born rich as we are born poor. The mass will always be the same; what it is, it always is. Those of us who go up in the world are fewer than those of you who come down. We know this very well, if we haven't book learning, that it won't do to be down upon us at every moment. We leave you in peace; let us live. Otherwise, if this goes on, you will be forced to feed us in your prisons, where we are far more comfortable than on our straw.—You are our masters, and you mean to remain so; we shall always be enemies, to-day as for these last thirty years. You have everything, we have nothing, so you cannot expect us to be your friends yet."

"That is what is called a declaration of war," said the General.

"When the Aigues belonged to the poor lady that is gone (the Lord have mercy on her soul, for she was a wanton singer in her youth) we were well off, your lordship. Her let us pick up a living in her fields, and take our firing in her forests; her was none the poorer for that! And you, that are at least as rich as she was, hunt us down like wild beasts, nor more nor less, and drag the poor people before the magistrate. Ah, well! no good will come of that. You will have some ugly doings laid at your door. I have just seen your forester, that curmudgeon of a Vatel, all but kill a poor old woman about a stick of firewood. They will make an enemy of the people of you; they will grow bitter against you at 'upsittings' as they work and talk; they will curse you as heartily as they used to bless madame that is gone. The poor man's curse grows, your lordship; it grows higher than the biggest of your oak-trees, and the oak-tree grows into the gallows-tree. . . . Nobody here tells you the truth; this is truth that I am telling you! Death may come to me any morning; I have not much to lose by letting you have the truth for less than market price. . . . I play tunes along with Vermichel for the peasants to dance to at the Café de la Paix at Soulanges; I hear their talk. Well, then, there is a bad feeling toward you; they will make the coun-

try too hot to hold you. If your damned Michaud doesn't turn over a new leaf, they will force you to turn him away! There, now! the advice and the otter are cheap at twenty francs—"

As old Fourchon delivered himself of these final remarks a man's footsteps sounded outside, and the object of his menaces suddenly appeared unannounced. It was easy to see that the threat had reached Michaud's ears from the look which he gave the orator of the poor. Old Fourchon's impudence forsook him; he looked like a thief confronted with the policeman. He knew that he had made a mistake, and that Michaud had, as it were, a right to call him to account, for an outpouring evidently meant to intimidate the dwellers at the Aigues.

"Behold the minister of war," said the General, addressing Blondet, with a gesture that indicated Michaud.

"I beg your pardon, madame, for coming into the room without asking your leave," remarked the minister, "but I must speak to the General on urgent business."

While Michaud made his apologies he watched Sibilet. The joy of the man's heart at Fourchon's bold tone expanded over his visage, unnoticed by any of those who sat at the table, who were interested in no small degree by the otter hunter. But Michaud, who, for reasons of his own, was always on the watch with Sibilet, was struck with the expression of the steward's face.

"He has certainly earned his twenty francs, as he says, M. le Comte," cried Sibilet; "the otter is not dear."

"Give him twenty francs," said the General, addressing his valet.

"Are you really taking it from me?" Blondet asked him.

"I will have the animal stuffed," cried the Count.

"Oh! your lordship, that kind gentleman would have let me have the skin!" protested old Fourchon.

"Very well," said the Countess. "You shall have five francs for the skin, but you can go now—"

The strong, rank odor of the two dwellers on the high-

road tainted the air of the room, and so offended Mme. de Montcornet's delicate senses that if the pair had stayed there much longer the lady would have been obliged to go. It was solely to this inconvenient quality that Fourchon owed his twenty-five francs. He went out, still eying Michaud fearfully, and making him obeisances without end.

"What I been telling his lordship, Môsieur Michaud," said he, "was for your good."

"Or for the good of them that you take pay of," said Michaud, looking him through and through.

"Bring coffee and leave us," the General ordered; "and, before all things, shut the doors."

Blondet had not yet seen the head-forester at the Aigues; his first impression was very different from that just made upon him by Sibilet. Michaud inspired confidence and esteem as great as the repulsion excited by Sibilet.

The head-forester's face caught your attention at once by its shapely outlines—the oval contours were as delicately molded as the profile, a regularity of feature seldom found in an ordinary Frenchman. Yet, in spite of this regularity of feature, the face was not lacking in character, perhaps by reason of its harmonious coloring, in which red and tawny tints prevailed, indications of physical courage. The clear, brown eyes were bright and keen, unfaltering in the expression of thought, and looked you straight in the face. The broad, open brow was set still further in relief by thick, black hair. There was a wrinkle here and there, traced by the profession of arms, on the fine face lighted up by loyalty, decision and self-reliance. If any doubt or suspicion entered his mind, it could be read there at once. His figure, still slender and shapely, as is the case with the men picked out for a crack regiment of cavalry, was such that the head-forester might be described as a strapping fellow. Michaud kept his mustaches, whiskers, and a beard beneath the chin; altogether, he recalled a military type which a deluge of patriotic prints and pictures has made almost ridiculous. The defect of the type is its over-abundance in the French army;

but perhaps this uniformity of physiognomy has its origin in the continuity of emotions, the hardships of camp life, from which no rank is exempt, and the fact that the same efforts are made on the field of battle by officers and men alike.

Michaud was dressed in dark blue from head to foot; he still wore the black satin stock and soldiers' boots, just as he held himself somewhat stiffly, with his shoulders set back and chest expanded, as if he still bore arms. The red ribbon of the Legion of Honor adorned his buttonhole. And (to add a final trait of character to a sketch of the mere outside of the man) while the steward, since he had come into office, had never omitted the formula "Monsieur le Comte" in addressing his patron, Michaud had never called his master by any name but "the General."

Once again Blondet exchanged a significant glance with the Abbe Brossette. "What a contrast!" he seemed to say, as he looked from the steward to the head-forester. Then, that he might learn whether the man's character, thoughts, and words were such as his face and stature might lead you to expect, he looked full at Michaud, saying:

"I say! I was out early this morning, and found your foresters still abed!"

"At what time?" asked the old soldier uneasily.

"At half-past seven."

Michaud gave his General an almost mischievous glance.

"And through which gate did you go out?" asked Michaud.

"The Conches gate. The keeper in his shirt took a look at me from the window," answered Blondet.

"Gaillard had just gone to bed, no doubt," replied Michaud. "When you told me that you had gone out early, I thought that you were up before sunrise, and if my forester had gone home so early he must have been ill; but at half-past seven he would be going to bed.—We are up all night," Michaud added, after a pause, by way of answer to a look of astonishment from the Countess; "but this vigilance of

ours is always at fault. You have just given twenty-five francs to a man who a few minutes ago was quietly helping to hide the traces of a theft committed on your property this very morning. In fact, as soon as the General is ready, we must talk it over, for something must be done—"

"You are always full of your rights, my dear Michaud, and *summum jus*, *summa injuria*. If you do not concede a point, you will make trouble for yourself," said Sibilet. "I could have liked you to hear old Fourchon talking just now when wine had loosened his tongue a little."

"He frightened me!" exclaimed the Countess.

"He said nothing that I have not known for a long time," said the General.

"Oh! the rascal was not drunk, he played a part, for whose benefit?—Perhaps you know?" Michaud suggested, looking steadily at Sibilet. The steward reddened under his gaze.

"*O rus!*" cried Blondet, looking out of the corner of his eye at the Abbe.

"The poor people suffer," said the Countess; "there was some truth in what old Fourchon has just shrieked at us, for it cannot be said that he *spoke*."

"Madame," answered Michaud, "do you think that the Emperor's soldiers lay in roses for fourteen years? The General is a count, he is a Grand Officer of the Legion of Honor, he has had grants of land made him; do I show any jealousy of him, I that have fought as he has? Have I any wish to cavil at his fame, to steal his land, or to refuse him the honor due to his rank?—The peasant ought to obey as the soldier obeys; he should have a soldier's loyalty, his respect for privileges won by other men, and try to rise to be an officer, by fair means, by his own exertions, and not by knavery. The sword and the plowshare are twin brothers. And in the soldier's lot there is one thing that the peasant has not: death hovering overhead at every hour."

"That is what I should like to tell them from the pulpit," cried the Abbe Brossette.

"Concessions?" the head-forester went on, in answer to Sibilet's challenge. "I would concede quite ten per cent on the gross returns from the Aigues, but the way things go now, the General loses thirty per cent; and if M. Sibilet is paid so much per cent on the receipts, I do not understand his concessions, for he pretty benevolently submits to a loss of ten or twelve hundred francs a year."

"My dear M. Michaud," retorted Sibilet in a surly tone, "I have told M. le Comte that I would rather lose twelve hundred francs than my life. Think it seriously over; I keep on telling you—"

"*Life!*" cried the Countess; "can it be a question of any one's life?"

"We ought not to discuss affairs of the State here," said the General, laughing.—"All this means, madame, that Sibilet, in his quality of finance minister, is timid and cowardly, while my minister of war is brave, and, like his General, fears nothing."

"Say prudent, M. le Comte?" cried Sibilet.

"Come, now, are we really surrounded by snares set for us by savages like the heroes of Fenimore Cooper's novels in the backwoods of America?"

"Come! your statesmanship, gentlemen, consists in understanding how to govern without alarming us by the creaking of the machinery of Government," said Mme. de Montcornet.

"Ah! Mme. la Comtesse, perhaps it is a needful thing that you should know what one of your pretty caps costs in sweat here," said the cure.

"No, for then I might very well do without them, look respectfully at a five-franc piece, and grow a miser, as all country people do, and I should lose too much by it," said the Countess, laughing.—"Here, my dear Abbe, give me your arm; let us leave the General with his two ministers, and go to the Avonne gate to see Mme. Michaud. I have not made a call upon her since I came; it is time to look after my little protégée."

And the pretty woman went for thick shoes and a hat;

Sibilet's fears, Mouche and Fourchon, their rags, and the hate in their eyes were already forgotten.

The Abbe Brossette and Blondet, obedient to the mistress of the house, followed her out of the room, and waited for her on the terrace in front of the chateau.

"What do you think of all this?" Blondet asked his companion.

"I am a pariah. I am watched by spies as the common enemy. Every moment I am obliged to keep the ears and eyes of prudence wide open, or I should fall into some of the snares they set so as to rid themselves of me," said the officiating priest. "Between ourselves, it has come to this, I ask myself whether they will not shoot me down—"

"And you stay on?" asked Blondet.

"A man no more deserts the cause of God than the cause of the Emperor!" the priest answered with a simplicity which impressed Blondet. He grasped the priest's hand cordially.

"So you must see," the Abbe continued, "that I am not in a position to know anything of all that is brewing. Still it seems to me that the people here have 'a spite against' the General, as they say in Artois and Belgium."

Something must here be said about the cure of Blangy.

The Abbe, the fourth son of a good middle-class family in Autun, was a clever man, carrying his head high on the score of his cloth. Short and thin though he was, he redeemed the insignificance of his appearance by that air of hard-headedness which sits not ill on a Burgundian. He had accepted a subordinate position through devotion, for his religious conviction had been backed by political conviction. There was something in him of the priest of other times; he had a passionate belief in the Church and his order; he looked at things as a whole, his ambition was untainted by selfishness. *Serve* was his motto, to serve the Church and the Monarchy at the point where danger threatens most, to serve in the ranks, like the soldier who feels within himself that his desire to acquit himself well and

his courage must bring him sooner or later a General's command. He faltered in none of his vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, acquitting himself in these respects, as in all the other duties of his position, with a simplicity and cheerfulness that is the unmistakable sign of an upright nature, in which natural instincts make for right as well as strong and earnest religious conviction.

This remarkable churchman saw at the first glance that Blondet was attracted to the Countess, saw also that with a daughter of the house of Troisville, and a man of letters, who supported the Monarchy, it behooved him to show himself a man of the world, for the dignity of the cloth. He came to make a fourth at whist almost every evening. Emile Blondet was able to appreciate the Abbe Brossette, and paid him marked deference, so that the two men felt attracted to each other; for every clever man is delighted to meet with an equal, or, if you prefer it, an audience, and there is a natural affinity between sword and scabbard.

"But now, M. l'Abbe, you whose earnestness has placed you below your proper level, what, in your opinion, has brought about this state of things?"

"I do not like to give you platitudes after that flattering parenthesis," said the Abbe, smiling. "The things that are happening in this valley are happening everywhere in France. It is all the outcome of the hopes and tendencies of 1789; they have filtered down, so to speak, into the peasants' minds. The Revolution affected some districts much more deeply than others; and in this strip of Burgundy lying so near to Paris, the significance of that movement was felt to be the triumph of the Gaul over the Frank. Historically, the peasants are still on the morrow of the Jacquerie; their defeat sank deeply into their minds. The facts have been long forgotten, but the idea has become instinctive in them. It is as much in the blood of the peasant as pride of birth was once in the blood of the noble. So the Revolution of 1789 was the revenge of the vanquished. The peasants have entered upon the ownership of the soil,

a possession forbidden to them by feudal law for twelve hundred years. Hence their love of the land; they divide it up among them till a single furrow is cut in half. It not seldom happens that they pay no taxes, for the property is so exceedingly small that it will not cover the costs of prosecution for arrears."

"Their wrongheadedness, their suspiciousness, if you will," Blondet broke in upon the Abbé, "in this respect is so great, that, in a thousand cantons out of three thousand in France, it is impossible for a rich man to buy land of a peasant. They will let or sell their bits of ground among themselves, but they will not give it up to a well-to-do farmer on any consideration whatever. The more the great landowner offers, the more their vague suspicions increase. Expropriation is the only means by which the peasant's holdings can be brought under the common law of the land. Plenty of people have noticed this fact, but they see no reason for it."

"This is the reason," said the Abbe Brossette, rightly considering that with Blondet a pause was a sort of interrogation. "Twelve centuries are as nothing to a caste which has never been diverted from its principal idea by the historical spectacle of civilization, a caste which still proudly wears the noble's broad-brimmed silk-bound hat since the day when it fell out of fashion and was abandoned to the peasants. The enthusiasm in the depths of the hearts of the people, which centred itself passionately on the figure of Napoleon (who never understood the secret of it as thoroughly as he imagined), sprang solely from this idea, which may perhaps explain the portent of his return in 1815—Napoleon, bound to the people by a million of common soldiers (first and last), is even yet, in their eyes, the king of the people, sprung from the loins of the Revolution, the man who confirmed them in the possession of the National lands. The oil at his coronation was saturated with this idea—"

"An idea which the year 1814 disturbed with unfortunate results, an idea which the Monarchy should regard as sacred," Blondet said quickly; "for the people may find

beside the throne a prince to whom his father left the head of Louis XVI. as part of his inheritance."

"Hush, here comes the Countess," said the Abbe Brossette. "Fourchon frightened her, and we must keep her here in the interests of religion, of the throne, nay, of the country itself."

Michaud, as head-forester, had doubtless come to report the injury done to Vatel's eyes. But before reporting the deliberations of the Council of State, the reader must be put in possession of a sequence of facts, a concise account of the circumstances under which the General bought the Aigues, and of the weighty reasons which determined Sibilet's appointment to the stewardship of the fine estate, together with an explanation of Michaud's installation as head-forester; in short, of all the antecedent facts that had brought people's minds into their present attitude, and given rise to the fears expressed by Sibilet.

There will be a further advantage in this rapid sketch, in that it will introduce several of the principal actors of the drama, give an outline of their interests, and set forth the dangers of the Comte de Montcornet's position.

VI

A TALE OF ROBBERS

IN 1791, or thereabout, Mlle. Laguerre came on a visit to her country house, and accepted as her new agent the son of an ex-steward of the neighboring manor of Soulagnes.

The little town of Soulanges at this day is simply the market-town of the district, though it was once the capital of a considerable county in the days when the House of Burgundy waged war against the House of France. Ville-aux-Fayes, now the seat of the sub-prefecture, was a mere petty fief in those days, a dependency of Soulanges like the Aigues, Ronquerolles, Cerneux, Conches, and fifteen hamlets besides; but the Soulanges still bear a count's coronet, while the Ronquerolles of to-day styles himself "Marquis," thanks to the intrigues of a court which raised the son of a Captain du Plessis to a dukedom over the heads of the first families of the Conquest. Which shows that towns, like families, have their vicissitudes.

The ex-steward's son, a penniless bachelor, succeeded an agent enriched by the spoils of thirty years of office. The agent had decided that a third share in the firm of Minoret would suit him better than the stewardship of the Aigues. The future victualler had recommended as his successor a young man who had been his responsible assistant for five years. François Gaubertin should cover his retreat, and, indeed, his pupil undertook (out of gratitude for his training) to obtain the late agent's discharge from Mlle. Laguerre, when he saw how the lady went in terror of the Revolution.

Gaubertin senior, ex-steward of the manor of Soulanges, and the public accuser of the department, took the timorous

operatic singer under his protection. She was "suspect" on the face of it, after her relations with the aristocracy; so the local Fouquier-Tinville got up a little comedy, an explosion of feeling against the stage-queen, in order to give his son a chance to play the part of deliverer. By these means, the young man obtained his predecessor's discharge, and citoyenne Laguerre made François Gaubertin her prime minister, partly out of gratitude, partly from policy.

The future victualler of the armies of the Republic had not spoiled mademoiselle. He annually remitted about thirty thousand livres to her in Paris, whereas the Aigues must have brought in forty thousand at the very least. When, therefore, François Gaubertin promised her thirty-six thousand francs, the ignorant opera-girl was amazed.

If the fortune subsequently amassed by François Gaubertin is to be justified before the tribunal of probability, its history must be traced from the beginning. First of all, young Gaubertin obtained the post of mayor of Blangy through his father's influence; and thenceforward, in spite of the law, he demanded that all payments should be made to him in coin. It was in his power to strike any one down by the ruinous requisitions of the Republic, and he used his power to "terrorize" his debtors (to use the language of the time). Then the steward punctually remitted his mistress's dues in *assignats*, so long as *assignats* were legal tender. If the finances of the country were the worse for the paper currency, at any rate it laid the foundation of many a private fortune.

In three years, between 1792 and 1795, young Gaubertin made a hundred and fifty thousand francs out of the Aigues, and speculated on the Paris money market. Mlle. Laguerre, embarrassed with her assignats, was obliged to coin money with her diamonds, hitherto useless. She sent them to Gaubertin, who sold them for her, and punctually remitted the money in coin. Mlle. Laguerre was so much touched by this piece of loyalty that from that time forth her belief in Gaubertin was as firm as her belief in Piccini.

In 1796, at the time of his marriage with citoyenne Isaure Mouchon (a daughter of one of his father's old friends of the Convention), young Gaubertin possessed three hundred and fifty thousand francs in coin; and as the Directory seemed to him to be likely to last, he determined that Mlle. Laguerre should pass the accounts of his five years' stewardship before he married, finding an excuse in that event in his life for the request.

"I shall be the father of a family," he said; "you know the sort of character an agent gets; my father-in-law is a Republican of Roman probity, and a man of influence moreover; I should like to show him that I am not unworthy of him."

Mlle. Laguerre expressed her satisfaction with Gaubertin's accounts in the most flattering terms.

At first the steward tried to check the peasants' depredations, partly to inspire confidence in Mlle. Laguerre, partly because he feared (and not without reason) that the returns would suffer, and that there would be a serious falling off in the timber merchant's tips. But by that time the sovereign people had learned to make pretty free everywhere; and the lady of the manor, beholding her kings at such close quarters, felt somewhat overawed by majesty, and signified to her Richelieu that, before all things, she most particularly desired to die in peace. The prima donna's income was so far too large for her needs that she suffered the most disastrous precedents. For instance, rather than take law proceedings, she allowed her neighbors to encroach upon her proprietor's rights. She never looked beyond the high walls of her park; she knew that nothing would pass them to trouble her felicity; she wished for nothing but a quiet life, like the true philosopher that she was. What were a few thousand livres of income, more or less, or rebates on sales of wood demanded by the merchants, on the ground that the peasants had spoiled the trees, in the eyes of a thriftless, reckless opera-girl, whose income of a hundred thousand francs had cost her nothing but pleasure, who had just sub-

mitted without a murmur to lose forty out of sixty thousand francs a year?

"Eh!" cried she, with the easy good-nature of an *impure* of the bygone eighteenth century, "every one must live, even the Republic!"

Mlle. Cochet, terrible power, her woman and female vizier, had tried to open her mistress's eyes when she saw what an ascendency Gaubertin had gained over "my lady," as he called her from the first, in spite of revolutionary laws of equality; but Gaubertin (in his turn) opened the waiting-maid's eyes by producing a document purporting to be a "denunciation" sent to his father, the public accuser, wherein Mlle. Cochet was vehemently accused of being in correspondence with Pitt and Cobourg.

Thenceforward the two powers ruled with divided sway, but *à la Montgomery*—under the rose. La Cochet praised Gaubertin to Mlle. Laguerre, just as Gaubertin extolled La Cochet to his mistress. Moreover, the woman knew that her nest was feathered, and that she could sleep securely on her mistress's legacy of sixty thousand francs. Madame was so used to La Cochet that she could not do without her. The maid knew all the secrets of "dear mistress's" toilette; she had the knack of sending "dear mistress" to sleep of an evening with endless stories, and could waken her in the morning with flattering words. In fact, La Cochet never saw any change in "dear mistress" till the day of her death, and when "dear mistress" lay in her coffin, probably thought that she looked better than ever.

The annual gains made by this pair, together with their salaries and perquisites, grew to be so considerable, that the most affectionate relatives could not have been more attached than they to the excellent creature their mistress. Does any one yet know how well a knave can lull his dupe? No mother is so tender or so thoughtful for an idolized daughter as a practitioner of *tartufferie* for his milch cow. What limits are there to the success of "Tartufe" played on many a pri-

vate stage? What is friendship in comparison? Molière died all too soon, he should have shown us the sequel—Orgon's despair, Orgon bored by his family and worried by his children, Orgon regretting Tartufe and his flatteries, muttering to himself, "Those were the good times!"

During the last eight years of Mlle. Laguerre's life she only received thirty out of the fifty thousand francs brought in by the Aigues. Gaubertin's reign ended in much the same way as the reign of his predecessor, though rents were higher and prices had risen notably between 1791 and 1815, and Mlle. Laguerre's estate increased by continued purchases. But it was part of Gaubertin's plan to inherit the estate on his mistress's approaching death, and therefore he was obliged to invent and maintain a chronic state of bad times. La Cochet, initiated into this scheme, was to share in the benefits.

Now the stage queen in exile possessed a supplementary income of twenty thousand livres from investments in consolidated government stock (note how admirably the language of politicians adapts itself to the humors of politics), and scarcely spent the aforesaid twenty thousand francs in a year, but she was amazed at the continual purchases of land made by the steward out of the surplus funds at his disposal. Never in her life before had she lived within her income; and now that her needs had shrunk with age, she mistook the symptoms, and credited Gaubertin and La Cochet with honesty.

"Two treasures!" she assured every one who came to see her.

Gaubertin, moreover, was careful of appearances; his accounts looked straightforward. All the rents were duly posted in the ledger; anything that could not fail to strike the actress's slender intelligence was definite, accurate, and precise, so far as figures went. But the steward took a percentage on all outgoing expenses, bargains about to be concluded, exploitations, contracts for repairs, and lawsuits

which he devised. His mistress never looked into these details, and so it not seldom happened that an arrangement was made by which the buyers paid double the prices entered, and were bound over to silence by receiving a share of the spoils. This easiness on Gaubertin's part won general popularity for himself, and every one praised his mistress; for besides being fleeced all round, she gave away a great deal of money.

"God preserve her, dear lady!" was the cry.

As a matter of fact, Mlle. Laguerre gave directly or indirectly to every one that asked of her. As a sort of Nemesis of youth, the opera singer was plundered in her age, so deftly and so systematically that her pillagers kept within certain bounds, lest her eyes should be opened to all that went on, and she should be frightened into selling the Aigues and going back to Paris.

It was (alas!) in the interest of such plunderers as these that Paul-Louis Courier was murdered. He had made the blunder of announcing beforehand that he meant to take his wife away and sell his estate, on which many a Tourangeau Tonsard was living. With this fear before their eyes, the marauders at the Aigues only cut down young trees when driven to extremities, when, for instance, there were no branches left which they could reach with a bill-hook tied to a pole. For the sake of their own ill-gotten gains, they did not go out of their way to do damage; and yet, during the last years of Mlle. Laguerre's life, the abuse of wood-cutting reached most scandalous proportions. On certain moonlit nights no less than two hundred fagots would be bound in the woods; and as for gleaning in fields and vineyards, the Aigues lost (as Sibilet had just pointed out) about one-fourth of its produce in such ways.

Mlle. Laguerre forbade La Cochet to marry during her own lifetime, a piece of selfishness where dependants are concerned that may be remarked all the world over, and in its absurdity about on a par with the mania of those who clutch till their latest sigh at possessions which have long

ceased to contribute to their enjoyment, at imminent risk of being poisoned by their impatient next-of-kin. So three weeks after Mlle. Laguerre was laid in the earth, Mlle. Cochet married a police sergeant at Soulanges, Soudry by name, a fine looking man of forty-two, who had come to the Aigues almost every day to see her since the creation of the police force in 1800, and dined at least four days a week with Gaubertin and La Cochet.

All through Madame's life she had had her meals served apart and alone when she had no visitors. In spite of the familiar terms on which she lived with La Cochet and Gaubertin, neither of them was permitted to sit at table with the first pupil of the *Académie royale de musique et de danse*, and to the very end she preserved her etiquette, her manner of dress, her rouge, her high-heeled pantofles, her carriage and servants, and divinity of the goddess. A goddess on the stage, a goddess of the town, though buried away in the country she was a goddess still; her memory is held in veneration there, dividing the honors very evenly with the court of Louis XVI. in the estimation of the "best society" of Soulanges.

The aforesaid Soudry, who paid court to La Cochet from the very first, was the owner of the nicest house in Soulanges and about six thousand francs, with a prospect of a retiring pension of four hundred francs. La Cochet, now Mme. Soudry, was a person of no little consequence in Soulanges. The retired lady's-maid was generally supposed to possess one of the largest fortunes in the little town of some twelve hundred inhabitants; but she never said a word about her savings, which were placed, together with Gaubertin's capital, in the hands of a wine merchant's commission agent in Paris, one Leclercq, who belonged to that part of the country, Gaubertin being his sleeping partner.

Great was the general astonishment when M. and Mme. Soudry, by their marriage-contract, legitimatized a natural son of the bridegroom; to this boy, therefore, Mme. Soudry's fortune would in due course descend. On the day

when he officially received a mother, he had just finished his law studies, and proposed to keep his terms so as to become a magistrate.

It is almost superfluous to add that there was a firm friendship between the Gaubertins and the Soudrys, a friendship which had its source in a mutual intelligence of twenty years' standing. Both sides were in duty bound till the end of their days to give each other out *urbi et orbi* for the salt of the earth. This interest, based on a knowledge on either side of secret stains on the white garment of conscience, is one of the most indissoluble of all bonds. You who read this social drama are so sure of this that, given the phenomenon of a lasting devotion which puts your egoism to the blush, you will say of the pair "that those two must have committed some crime together."

After twenty-five years of stewardship, the steward found that he could command six hundred thousand francs in coin, and La Cochet possessed about two hundred and fifty thousand. Dexterous and continual changes of investment did not a little to swell the capital deposited with the firm of Leclercq & Company on the Quai de Béthune in the Ile Saint-Louis (rivals of the famous house of Grandet), and helped to build up fortunes for the commission agent and Gaubertin. After Mlle. Laguerre's death, Leclercq, the head of the firm on the Quai de Béthune, asked for the steward's eldest daughter, Jenny, in marriage, and then it was that Gaubertin flattered himself that he saw how to make himself master of the Aigues. Twelve years previously a notary had set up at Soulanges through Gaubertin's influence, and in Maître Lupin's office the plot was hatched.

Lupin, a son of the Comte de Soulanges's late agent, had lent himself to all the various manœuvres, unhappily too common in out-of-the-way country places, by which important pieces of property change hands in a hole-and-corner sort of way—to use a popular expression—such methods, for example, as undervaluations of real estate, or putting up property for sale and fixing the reserve bid at one-half

the actual value, or distributing unauthorized placards. Lately, so it is said, he has formed a society in Paris for blackmailing weavers of such schemes with threats of running prices up against them; but in 1816 the scorching glare of publicity, in which we live to-day, had not yet been turned on France, so those in the plot might fairly reckon upon dividing the Aigues among them. It was a job arranged by La Cochet, the notary and Gaubertin; the latter reserving *in petto* his own further scheme of buying out his confederates so soon as the land should be purchased in his name. Lupin chose the attorney, whom he instructed to make application to the court for leave to sell. This man had agreed to make over his practice to Gaubertin's son, and was waiting to receive payment, so that he had an interest in the spoliation, if indeed those eleven laborers in Picardy, who came in for such an unexpected windfall, could regard themselves as despoiled.

But on the eve of the auction, at the moment when all concerned thought themselves secure of doubling their fortunes at a stroke, there came down a solicitor from Paris, who went to a solicitor at Ville-aux-Fayes (an old clerk of his, as it turned out), and the former empowered the latter to buy the Aigues, which he accordingly did, for eleven hundred and fifty thousand francs. Gaubertin was convinced that Soudry was at the bottom of this, and Lupin and Soudry were equally sure that Gaubertin had outwitted them both; but when the purchaser's name was declared, a reconciliation took place.

The country solicitor had his own suspicions of the plans formed by Gaubertin, Lupin, and Soudry, but he was very careful not to enlighten his sometime employer, and for the following excellent reason: Unless the newcomer kept his own counsel, the ministerial official would have the country made too hot to hold him. The wisdom of his taciturnity was, moreover, amply justified by the subsequent course of events to be related in this *Étude*. If the provincial is crafty, it is in self-defence; his excuse lies in

the danger of a position admirably depicted by the popular adage, "One must howl with the wolves," a doctrine which finds its concrete expression in the character of Philinte.

So when General de Montcornet took possession of the Aigues, Gaubertin was not rich enough to resign his post. If his eldest daughter was to marry the rich banker of the Entrepôt, her portion of two hundred thousand francs must be forthcoming; then there was his son's practice, which would cost thirty thousand francs; and out of the three hundred and seventy thousand which still remained to him, he must sooner or later find a dowry for his younger girl Élise, who, he hoped, would make a match as brilliant as that of her older sister. The steward determined to study Montcornet's character, possibly he might contrive to disgust the General with the place, and to reap the benefit of his abortive schemes.

With the peculiar shrewdness of those who have made their way by cunning, Gaubertin put faith in a not ill-grounded belief in a general resemblance between the character of an old soldier and an aged actress. An opera girl, and one of Napoleon's old generals—what could you expect of either but the same thriftlessness, the same careless ways? To the adventuress and to the soldier fortune comes capriciously and through peril. There may be astute, shrewd, and politic military men, but they surely are not the ordinary stamp: the typical soldier is supposed to be simple and unsuspecting, a child in matters of business, and but little fitted to cope with the thousand and one details of the management of a great estate, and this more particularly in the case of such a fire-eater as Montcornet. Gaubertin flattered himself that he could take and hold the General in the net in which Mlle. Laguerre had ended her days. But it so happened that, in the time of the Emperor, Montcornet had himself been in very much such a position in Pomerania as Gaubertin held at the Aigues, and the General had had practical experience of the opportunities of a stewardship.

When the old Cuirassier took to "planting cabbages," to use the expression of the first Duc de Biron, he wanted some occupation to divert his mind from his fall. Although he had carried his corps over to the Bourbons, his share of a service performed by several generals, and christened the "Disbanding of the Army of the Loire," could not redeem his blunder of the following year, when Montcornet had followed the Man of the Hundred Days to his last field of battle at Waterloo. During the occupation of the Allies it was impossible for the peer of 1815 to remain on the muster-roll of the army, and still more impossible to retain his seat at the Luxembourg. So Montcornet acted on the advice of the old maréchal in disgrace, and went to cultivate carrots in sober earnest. The General was not wanting in the shrewdness of an old war-wolf. During the very first days spent in investigating his possessions, he soon found out the sort of man that he had to do with in Gaubertin; for the typical steward under the old noblesse was a variety of rogue familiar to almost all of Napoleon's mushroom nobility of dukes and marshals sprung from beds of straw.

The shrewd old Cuirassier likewise saw how useful Gaubertin's profound experience of agricultural administration and the manners and customs of misdemeanants would be to him; so he appeared to be a continuation of Mlle. Laguerre, with an assumption of carelessness which deceived the steward. The period of ineptitude lasted until the General had time to find out the strong and weak points of the Aigues, the ins and outs of the receipts, the manner in which rents were collected, the necessary improvements and economies, and the ways in which he was robbed.

Then one fine day, catching Gaubertin with his hand in the bag (to use the time-honored expression), the General took occasion to fly into one of the fearful passions to which the conquering hero is peculiarly subject. Therein he committed a capital error. It was one of those blunders which would have shaken the future of a man who had not his great wealth or firmness of purpose, and there, in fact, was

the origin of the whole tissue of disasters, great and small, with which this story teems. Montcornet had been trained in the Imperial school, he slashed his way through difficulties, and deep was his scorn of civilians. Montcornet could not see that there was any need to mince matters when a rascally steward was to be sent about his business. The General knew nothing of civil life and its countless precautions, his temper was not improved by his disgrace, so he inflicted a deep mortification on Gaubertin, who, moreover, drew it upon himself by a cynical retort that infuriated the General.

"So you are living on my land!" the Count had remarked with grim hilarity.

"Did you suppose that I could live on what falls from heaven?" Gaubertin retorted with a grin.

"Get out of this, you scamp, or I'll make you!" roared the General, accompanying the words with several cuts of a horsewhip, though the steward always denied a thrashing that no one witnessed.

"I shall not go till I have my discharge," Gaubertin exclaimed coolly, as soon as he had put a distance between himself and the truculent Cuirassier.

"We shall see what they think of you in a court of law," returned Montcornet, with a shrug.

At the threat of prosecution, Gaubertin looked the Count in the face and smiled; it was a smile of peculiar efficacy, for the General's arm dropped to his side as if the sinews had been cut. Let us go into the explanation of that smile.

Two years before Gaubertin's brother-in-law Gendrin had been appointed to the presidency of the Court of First Instance, where he had long been a judge. He owed the appointment to the Comte de Soulanges, who had been made a peer of France in 1814, and had kept stanch to the Bourbons during the Hundred Days. M. de Soulanges had asked the Keeper of the Seals to nominate Gendrin. Such kinship as this gave Gaubertin a certain importance in the country. A president of a Court of First Instance in a small town is, relatively speaking, a much greater person than the president of

a Court-Royal in a city where there are rival luminaries in the shape of the commander, the bishop, prefect, and receiver-general; a simple president of a Court of First Instance shines alone, for neither the public prosecutor nor the sub-prefect is a permanent official. Young Soudry and Gaubertin's son had been friends as lads at the Aigues, and afterward in Paris, and now young Soudry had just received the appointment of public prosecutor's substitute in the chief town of the department.

Soudry, senior, once a quartermaster in an artillery regiment, had been wounded in an action in defence of M. de Soulanges, then adjutant-general. Since those days the gendarmerie had been established, and M. de Soulanges (now a colonel) asked for a police sergeant's post for the man who had saved his life, and, at a later time, obtained a post for Soudry's son. And finally, when Mlle. Gaubertin's marriage had been definitely arranged at the Quai de Bethune, the unjust steward felt that he had a stronger position in the district than an unattached lieutenant-general.

If this story were nothing but a chronicle of the rupture between the General and his steward, it would even then be well worth serious attention, as a guide to the conduct of life. Those who can profit by the perusal of Machiavelli's treatise will find it demonstrated therein that, in dealing with human nature, it is a prudent course to refrain from menaces, to proceed to act without talking about it, to leave a way of escape open to a defeated enemy, to be very careful, as the saying is, not to tread on a serpent's tail, and to avoid, like murder, any mortification to an inferior. A deed, once done, is forgiven sooner or later, injurious though it may have been to other people's interests (a fact which may be explained in ways too numerous to mention), but a wound dealt to self-love is never stanched, and never pardoned. Our mental susceptibilities are keener and, in a sense, more vital than our physical susceptibilities, and the heart and arteries are less sensitive than the nerves. In everything that we do, in fact, it is this inmost *ego* who rules us. Civil war will

quench an ancestral blood-feud, as has been seen in the history of Breton and Vendean families; but between the spoiler and the spoiled, the slanderer and his victim, no reconciliation is possible. People should refrain from insulting each other, except in epic poems, before a general and final slaughter.

The savage and his near relation, the peasant, never make use of articulate speech, except to lay traps for their enemies. Ever since 1789 France has been trying to persuade mankind, against all evidence to the contrary, that all men are equal; you may tell a man that he is a rascal, and it passes for a harmless joke; but once proceed to bring it home to him by detecting him in the act, and enforcing your conclusion by a horsewhip, once threaten him with prosecution and fail to execute your threat, and you set up the old conditions of inequality again. And if the people cannot suffer any superiority, how should any rogue forgive an honest man?

Montcornet should have parted with his steward on some pretext of old obligations to fulfil, some old soldier to put in his place; and both Gaubertin and the General would have known the real reason perfectly well. If the latter had been more careful of the former's self-love, he would have left an open door for the man's retreat, and Gaubertin would have left the great landowner in peace; he would have forgotten his defeat at the auction, and very likely would have looked for an investment for his capital in Paris. But now that he was ignominiously driven from his post, he nursed a rancorous hatred of his employer, one of those hatreds which are an element of provincial life; so lasting and so pertinacious are they, that their intricate meshes amaze diplomatists, whose cue it is to be astonished at nothing. A burning thirst for vengeance counselled retirement to Ville-aux-Fayes; there he would put himself in a position which gave him power to annoy Montcornet, and raise up enemies in sufficient force to compel him to sell the Aigues.

Everything combined to deceive the General. Nothing in Gaubertin's appearance was calculated to warn or alarm him. The steward had always made it a rule to pose not exactly as a poor man, but as a man who found it difficult to make both ends meet—a tradition which was handed down by his predecessor. Therefore for the last twelve years he put his wife and three children forward on all occasions, and talked about the heavy expenses of so large a family. It was Mlle. Laguerre who paid for his son's education in Paris; Gaubertin told her that he himself was too poor to afford the expense; and she, Claude Gaubertin's godmother, had allowed her dear godson a hundred louis per annum.

The next day Gaubertin appeared accompanied by one of the keepers, Courtecuisse by name, and held his head high, and asked for his discharge. He laid before the General the discharges given him by the late Mlle. Laguerre, all couched in flattering terms, and begged, with ironical humility, that the General would discover and point out any instances of misappropriation on his (Gaubertin's) part. If he received a bonus from the timber merchants and farmers on the renewal of contracts or leases, Mlle. Laguerre had always authorized it (he said), and she had actually been a gainer by so doing; and not only so, by these means she had lived in peace. Any one in the countryside would have died for Mademoiselle; but if the General went on in this way, he was laying up trouble in plenty for himself.

Gaubertin believed—and this last trait is very common in most professions where men exercise their wits to take their neighbor's goods in ways unprovided for by the Code —Gaubertin believed that he was a perfectly honest man. In the first place, there was the old affair of the coin wrung from the tenants during the Terror; it was so long now since he remitted the rents to Mlle. Laguerre in assignats and pocketed the difference that he had come to regard the money as lawfully acquired gain. It was simply a matter

of exchange. Before he had done, he began to think that he had even run some risk in taking silver crowns, and besides, *legally*, Mademoiselle had no right to anything but assignats. *Legally* is a robust adverb; it carries the weight of many ill-gotten gains! Finally, ever since great landowners and stewards have existed, which is to say, ever since the first beginnings of civilization, the steward has fabricated for his personal use a chain of reasoning that finds favor with cookmaids at the present day, and which may be concisely stated as follows:

"If my mistress went to market herself" (so the handmaid privately argues), "she perhaps would buy dearer than I do; so she is a gainer, and the profit that I make had better go into my pocket than to the shop-keepers."

"If Mlle. Laguerre were to manage the Aigues for herself, she would not make thirty thousand francs out of it; the peasants, and timber merchants, and laborers would rob her of the difference; it is more natural that I should keep it, and I spare her a deal of trouble," said Gaubertin to himself.

No influence save the Catholic religion has power to prevent such capitulation of conscience; but since 1789 religion in France has lost its hold on two-thirds of the population. Poverty induces uniformity, and in the valley of the Aigues, where the peasants were mentally very wide awake, they had sunk to a frightful degree of moral degradation. They certainly went to mass of a Sunday, but they stopped ouside the church, and had fallen into a habit of meeting there regularly to conclude bargains and discuss business.

The reader should by this time have an idea of the extent of the mischief done by the easy-going ways of the first pupil of the *Académie royale de musique*. Mlle. Laguerre's selfishness had injured the cause of those who have, always an object of hatred to those who have not. Since 1792 all the landowners of France must show a compact front, and stand or fall together. Alas! if the families of feudal nobles, less numerous than bourgeois families, could not understand the unity of their interests in 1400 in the time of Louis XI., nor

yet again in 1600 under Richelieu, how should the bourgeoisie of this nineteenth century (in spite of its boasted progress) be more united than the old noblesse? An oligarchy of a hundred thousand rich men has all the drawbacks of a democracy with none of its advantages. *Each for himself! Let each man mind his own business!* Family selfishness is stronger than the class selfishness so much needed by society in these days, that oligarchical selfishness of which England has exhibited such a striking example for the past three hundred years. No matter what is done, the landowners will never see any necessity for a discipline through which the Church has come to be such an admirable model of government, until the moment when the threatened danger comes home to them, and then it will be too late. Communism, that living force and practical logic of democracy, is already attacking society in the domain of theory, whence it is evident that the proletarian Samson, grown prudent, will henceforth sap the pillars of society in the cellar, instead of shaking them in the banqueting hall.

VII

OF EXTINCT SOCIAL SPECIES

THE AIGUES must have a steward, for the General had no idea of giving up the pleasures of the winter season in Paris, where he had a splendid mansion in the Rue Neuve-des-Mathurins. So he looked out for a successor to Gaubertin; but, in truth, he was at less pains to find a steward than Gaubertin to put a man of his own choosing into the place.

Of all responsible posts, there is not one which demands greater experience and more activity than the stewardship of a great estate. The difficulty of finding the man is only appreciated by great landowners, and becomes acute only at a distance of say forty leagues from the capital. That is the limit of the area which supplies the Paris markets, the limit also of steady rents and of long leases, and of tenants with capital in competition for them. Tenants of this class come into town in cabriolets and pay their rent with checks, if indeed their salesman at the Great Market does not make their payments for them. There is such brisk competition for farms in the departments of Seine-et-Oise, Seine-et-Marne, Oise, Eure-et-Loire, Seine-Inférieure, and Loiret, that capital does not always return one and a half per cent. Even compared with the returns of land in Holland, Belgium, and England, this produce is enormous; but beyond a limit of fifty leagues from Paris, a large estate means so many different forms of cultivation, so many and such different crops, that farming becomes an industry, with a manufacturer's risks. A great landowner under these circumstances is nothing but a merchant, who must find a market for his produce like any iron-master or cotton-spinner. Nor

is he without competitors; the peasants and the small proprietors cut down his profits remorselessly by descending to transactions in which no gentleman will engage.

A steward should know the system of land measurement, the customs of the countryside, the methods of sale and exploitation, and must be able to sail pretty near the wind in his employer's interest. He must understand book-keeping; and, besides enjoying the best of health, must have a decided taste for equitation and an active life. He is the master's representative, and always in communication with him, and cannot be a man of the people. And as few stewards' salaries exceed a thousand crowns per annum, the problem of discovering the model steward would appear to be insoluble. How should a man combining so many precious qualities be found at such a moderate price, where any employment is open to him in this country? . . . Send for a man who does not know the district, and you shall pay dear for the experience he acquires. Train up a youth who belongs to the neighborhood, and in all likelihood you cocker ingratitude. So you are left to choose between honest ineptitude, so slow or so short-sighted as to injure your interests, and self-seeking cleverness. Wherefore the classification and natural history of stewards was thus summed up by a great Polish landowner, "There are two varieties here," said he; "the first kind of steward thinks of no one but himself; the second thinks of us as well as of himself; happy the landowner who can put his hand on the second! As for the steward who only thinks of your interests, he has never been seen here up to the present time!"

An example of a steward who bears his employer's interests in mind, as well as his own, has been given elsewhere;[1] Gaubertin is the steward who thinks of nothing but his own fortune; as for the third term of the problem, any representation of him would probably be regarded as a fancy portrait; he was known to the old noblesse, but the type vanished with them.[2] The continual subdivision of fortunes inevi-

[1] See Un Début dans la Vie.

[2] Le Cabinet des Antiques.

tably brings about a change in the way of life of the aristocracy. If there are not at present twenty fortunes administered by a steward, in fifty years' time there will not be a hundred great estates left for stewards to administer, unless some change is made meanwhile in the law. Every rich landowner will be obliged to look closely to his own interests himself. This process of transformation, even now begun, suggested the remark made by a witty old lady, who was asked why she had spent the summer in Paris since 1830: "Since the châteaux became farmhouses I have ceased to visit them," she said.

But what will be the end of a dispute which waxes hotter and hotter between man and man, between rich and poor? This *Etude* has been undertaken to throw light upon this terrible social question, and for no other reason.

The General had dismissed Gaubertin, and the General's awkward predicament may be imagined. While saying vaguely to himself, like all persons who are free to act or no, "I will get rid of that rogue," he had not reckoned with fate, nor with his own furious outbursts of anger, the anger of a choleric fire-eater, ready to break out as soon as some flagrant misdeed should force him to raise the eyelids which he deliberately closed.

Montcornet, a Parisian born and bred, was a landowner for the first time in his life, and his preliminary studies of the country had convinced him that some intermediary between a man in his position and so many peasants was absolutely necessary; but he had omitted to provide himself beforehand with a steward.

Gaubertin, in the course of an exchange of courtesies which lasted for a couple of hours, discovered the General's predicament; so on leaving the house, the ex-steward bestrode his cob and galloped off to take counsel with Soudry at Soulanges.

No sooner had he said, "The General and I have parted company; how can we fit him with a steward of our own

choosing?" than the Soudrys saw what their friend had in mind. It must not be forgotten that police sergeant Soudry had been in office in the canton for seventeen years, and that to back him he had a wife endowed with the cunning peculiar to an opera singer's waiting-maid.

"He will go a long way before he will find any one as good as poor Sibilet," said Mme. Soudry.

"His goose is cooked!" cried Gaubertin, still red with the humiliations he had been through.

"Lupin," he went on, turning to the notary who was present, "just go down to Ville-aux-Fayes and prime Maréchal, in case our fine Cuirassier goes to ask him for information."

Marechal was the local solicitor who had bought the Aigues, and had naturally been recommended to Montcornet by his own family solicitor in Paris after the happy conclusion of the bargain.

The Sibilet to whom they alluded, the oldest son of the clerk of the court at Ville-aux-Fayes, was a notary's clerk without a penny to bless himself with. He had fallen madly in love at the age of twenty-five with the daughter of the justice of the peace at Soulanges.

That worthy magistrate, Sarcus by name, having a stipend of fifteen hundred francs, had married a penniless girl, the oldest sister of the Soulanges apothecary, M. Vermut. Mlle. Sarcus was an only daughter, but her beauty was all her dowry, and she could not be said to live on the salary of a country notary's clerk. Young Sibilet was related to Gaubertin (his precise degree of relationship would have been rather difficult to trace among the family ramifications of a small town where all the middle class people were cousins); but, thanks to his father and to Gaubertin, he had a modest place in the Land Registration Department. To this luckless young man's lot fell the alarming blessing of two children in three years' time. His own father had a family of five, and could do nothing to help his son; his father-in-law, the justice of the peace, had nothing but his house in Sou-

langes, and a thousand crowns of income, so Mme. Sibilet the younger, and her two children, lived for the most part under her father's roof; and Adolphe Sibilet, whose duties took him all over the department, only saw his Adeline at intervals, an arrangement which perhaps explains the fruitfulness of some marriages.

Gaubertin's exclamation will be easily understood by the light of this summary of Sibilet's history, but a few explanatory details must be added. Adolphe Sibilet, surpassingly ill favored, as has been seen in a preceding sketch, belonged to that class of men whose only way to a woman's heart lies through the mayor's office and the church. With something of the suppleness of a steel spring, he would relinquish his idea to seize on it again at a later day, a shifty disposition of mind closely resembling baseness; but in the course of an apprenticeship served in a country notary's office, Sibilet had learned to hide this defect beneath a gruff manner, which simulated a strength which he did not possess. Plenty of hollow natures mask their emptiness in this way; deal their own measure to them, and you shall see them collapse like a balloon at a pin-prick. This was the clerk's son. But as men, for the most part, are not observers, and as among observers three-fourths observe after the fact, Adolphe Sibilet's grumbling manner was taken for the result of an honest outspoken nature, a capacity much praised by his employer, and an upright integrity which had never been put to the proof. Sometimes a man's defects are as useful to him as better qualities to his neighbor.

Adeline Sarcus, a nice-looking young woman, had been brought up by a mother (who died three years before her marriage) as carefully as only daughters can be educated in a little out-of-the-way place. Adeline was in love with the handsome Lupin, only son of the Soulanges notary. But her romance was still in its early chapters when Lupin senior (who intended his son to marry Mlle. Elise Gaubertin) sent young Amaury Lupin to Paris into the office of Maître Crottat, notary; and under the pretence of studying the art

of conveyancing and drawing up contracts, Amaury led a wild life, and got into debt under the auspices of another clerk in the same office, one George Marest, a wealthy young fellow, who initiated Lupin into the mysteries of Parisian life. By the time that Maître Lupin came to fetch his son home again, Adeline had changed her name, and was Mme. Sibilet. In fact, when the amorous Adolphe presented himself, Sarcus, the old justice of the peace, acting on a hint from Lupin senior, hastened on a marriage, to which Adeline resigned herself in despair.

An assessor's place is not a career. Like many other departments which offer no prospects, it is a sort of hole in the administrative colander. The men who start in life through one of these holes (say in the Ordnance Survey, Department of Roads and Bridges, or the teaching profession) always discover a little late that cleverer men than they, seated beside them, are "kept moist by the sweat of the people" (in the language of Opposition writers) every time that the colander is dipped into the taxes by means of the machinery called the Budget. Adolphe, working early and late, and earning little, very soon discovered the bottomless barrenness of his hole; so as he trotted from commune to commune, spending his salary on travelling expenses and shoe leather, his thoughts were busy with schemes for finding a permanent and profitable situation.

No one can imagine, unless indeed he happens to squint and to have two children born in lawful wedlock, how three years of struggle and love had developed ambition in this young fellow, who had a mental squint resembling his physical infirmity, and whose happiness halted, as it were. Perhaps an incomplete happiness is the chief cause of most scoundrelly actions and untold basenesses committed in secret; it may be that we can more easily endure hopeless misery than steady rain, with brief glimpses of sunshine and love. Just as the body contracts diseases, the soul contracts the canker of envy. In little natures envy becomes a base and brutal covetousness, shrinking from sight, but from nothing

else; in cultivated minds it fosters subversive doctrines, which a man uses as a stepping-stone to raise himself above his superiors. Might not the situation be summed up in an aphorism, "Tell me what you have, and I will tell you your opinions?"

Adolphe was fond of his wife, but he constantly said to himself, "I have made a mistake; I have three sets of shackles, and only one pair of legs: I ought to have made my way before I married. I might have found an Adeline any day; but now Adeline stands in my way."

Adolphe had gone to see his relative Gaubertin three times in as many years. A few words that he let fall told Gaubertin that here in his relative's soul was the mud which hardens under the fiery heat of the temptation of legalized robbery. Warily he probed this nature, which seemed plastic to his purpose, provided it were worth while to yield. Adolphe Sibilet grumbled on each occasion.

"Just find me something to do, cousin," he said. "Take me on as your clerk, and make me your successor. I would remove mountains to give my Adeline, I will not say luxury, but a modest competence. You made M. Leclercq's fortune; why should you not start me in the banking line in Paris?"

"We will see. Some day I will find a place for you," his ambitious relative would reply. "Meantime, make acquaintances, everything helps."

In this frame of mind a letter from Mme. Soudry, bidding him "come at once," brought Adolphe in hot haste to Soulanges through a region of castles in the air.

The Soudrys explained to Sarcus that on him devolved the duty of calling on the General on the morrow to put in a word for his son-in-law, and suggest Adolphe for the vacant position. Acting on the advice of Mme. Soudry, the local oracle, the old man had taken his daughter with him, and the sight of her had disposed Montcornet in their favor.

"I shall not decide until I have made inquiries," the

General said, "but I will not look out for any one else until I have seen whether or no your son-in-law is in all respects the man for the place. The desire of settling so charming a young lady at the Aigues—"

"The mother of two children, General," said Adeline adroitly, to turn off the old soldier's compliments.

All the General's inquiries were cleverly anticipated by the Soudrys, with Gaubertin and Lupin, who skilfully obtained for their candidate the influence of the leading men in the principal town of the canton—Councillor Gendrin of the Court-Royal (a distant relation of the president at Villeaux-Fayes); Baron Bourlac, attorney-general, and young Soudry's chief; and Sarcus, councillor of the prefecture, third cousin to Adeline's father. Everybody, from the General's solicitor to the prefect (to whom the General went in person), had a good word for the underpaid official, "so interesting" he was said to be. Sibilet's marriage made him as irreproachable as one of Miss Edgeworth's novels, and marked him out as a man above mercenary motives.

The time which the steward spent perforce at the Aigues was turned to profit. He did all that in him lay to make trouble and annoyance for his old employer, but a single little scene will give a sufficient idea of the rest. The day after his dismissal he made an opportunity of finding Courtecuisse, the one forester employed under his rule at the Aigues, which really required three at the least.

"Well, M. Gaubertin," remarked the other, "so you have had words with the master, have you?"

"You know that already!" exclaimed Gaubertin. "Well, yes. The General takes it upon himself to order us about like his Cuirassiers; he does not know us Burgundians. M. le Comte was not satisfied with my services, and as I was not satisfied with his ways, we dismissed each other; we almost came to blows over it, for he is a perfect tempest. Look out for yourself, Courtecuisse! Ah! old boy, I once thought to have given you a better master—"

"I know you did," said the keeper, "and I would have

served you well. Lord! after knowing each other these twenty years.—You took me on here in poor dear sainted Madame's time! Ah! a kind woman she was; they don't make such as her now! The place has lost a mother in her."

"I say, Courtecuisse, if you are willing, you can do us a fine good turn."

"Then are you going to stop in the place? We heard you were going to Paris."

"No. I shall find something to do at Ville-aux-Fayes, and see how things turn out. The General does not know the people he is dealing with; he will be hated, do you see? I must wait and see if anything turns up. Go softly about your business here; he will tell you to carry things with a high hand, for he can see well enough where the waste goes on. But do not you be so thick-headed as to lay yourself open to a drubbing, and maybe worse than a drubbing, from the people round about for the sake of his timber."

"Dear M. Gaubertin, he will turn me away, and you know how very well off I am at the Avonne gate."

"The General will be sick of his property before long," said Gaubertin; "it will not be long before you come back if he does turn you off.—And besides, do you see these woods here?" he added, waving his hand toward the landscape, "I am stronger there than the masters."

They were talking out in a field.

"These *Arminacs* from Paris ought to keep to their gutters in Paris," said the keeper.

That word *Arminacs* has come down from the fifteenth century, when the Armagnacs, the Parisians, were hostile to the Duke of Burgundy. It is a word of abuse to-day on the outskirts of Upper Burgundy, where it is mispronounced in various ways in different districts.

"He shall go back, but not before he has had a thrashing!" said Gaubertin. "Some of these days we will turn the park at the Aigues into plowed land, for it is robbing the people to keep nine hundred acres of the best land in the valley for the pleasure of an upstart."

"Lord! that would keep four hundred families!" put in Courtecuisse.

"Well, if you want two acres for yourself out of it, you must help us to make an outlaw of that cur—"

While Gaubertin was fulminating his sentence of excommunication, the worthy justice of the peace was introducing his son-in-law, Adolphe Sibilet, to the General. Adeline had come with the two children in the basket-chaise borrowed of Sarcus's registrar, a M. Gourdon, brother of the Soulanges doctor, and a richer man than the justice. This kind of thing, which suits but ill with the dignity of the magistrate's office, is to be seen everywhere; every justice's clerk is richer than the justice himself; every clerk of a Court of First Instance is better paid than the president; whereas it would seem only natural to pay the subordinate, not by fees, but by a fixed salary, and so to cut down the expenses of litigation.

The General was well pleased with the worthy functionary's character and straightforwardness, and with Adeline's charming appearance; and, in fact, these two made their promises in all good faith, for neither father nor daughter knew of the diplomatic part cut out for Sibilet by Gaubertin; so M. de Montcornet at once made to the young and interesting couple proposals which would make the position of steward of the manor equal to that of a sub-prefect of the first class.

A lodge built by Bouret, partly as a feature of the landscape, partly as a house for the steward, was assigned to the Sibilets. It was a picturesque building in the same style as the Blangy gate, which has been sufficiently described already; Gaubertin had previously lived there. The General showed no intention of putting down the riding-horse which Mlle. Laguerre had allowed Gaubertin for his own use, on account of the size of the estate, and the distance he was obliged to go to markets and on other necessary business. The new steward was allowed a hundred bushels of wheat, three hogsheads of wine, as much firewood as he required,

oats and barley in abundance, and three per cent upon the receipts. If Mlle. Laguerre had drawn more than forty thousand livres of income from the estate in 1800, the General thought, and with good reason, that after all her numerous and important purchases it should bring in sixty thousand in 1818. The new steward, therefore, might look to make nearly two thousand francs in money some day. He would live rent free and tax free, with no expenses for food, or fuel, or horse, or poultry-yard; and besides all this, the Count allowed him a kitchen garden, and promised not to consider a day's work done in it by the gardener now and again. Such advantages were certainly worth a good two thousand francs. The stewardship of the Aigues after the assessorship was a transition from penury to wealth.

"If you devote yourself to my interests," said the General, "I may do more for you. For one thing, I shall have it in my power to appoint you to collect the taxes in Conches, Blangy, and Cerneux, separating those three places from the Soulanges division. In short, as soon as you bring the net receipts up to sixty thousand francs, you shall have your reward."

Unluckily, the worthy Sarcus and Adeline, in the joy of their hearts, were so imprudent as to tell Mme. Soudry about the Count's promise. They forgot that the receiver at Soulanges was one Guerbet, brother of the postmaster at Conches, and a connection, as will be seen later, of the Gendrins and Gaubertins.

"It will not be easy to do, my child," said Mme. Soudry, "but do not hinder the Count from setting about it; no one knows how easily the hardest things are done in Paris. I have seen the Chevalier Gluck down on his knees to Madame that's gone, and she sang his part for him—she that would have cut herself in pieces for Piccini, and Piccini was one of the most agreeable men of those days. He never came to Madame's house, dear gentleman, but he would put his arm round my waist and call me his 'pretty rogue.'"

"Oh, indeed!" cried the sergeant, when his wife retailed

this piece of news, "so he thinks that he will do as he likes with the place, turn things upside down, and order people about right and left as if they were men in his regiment. These officers have domineering ways! But wait a while, we have M. de Soulanges and M. de Ronquerolles on our side. Poor old Guerbet, how little he suspects that they mean to pluck the finest roses off his tree."

The lady's maid had this piece of Dorat phraseology from Mlle. Laguerre, who learned it of Bouret, who had it from some editor of the "Mercure." And now Soudry used it so often that it became a current saying at Soulanges.

Now "old Guerbet," receiver of taxes at Soulanges, was a local wit, the stock comic character of the little town, and one of the notables in Mme. Soudry's set. The sergeant's outburst exactly expressed the general feeling toward the master of the Aigues. From Conches to Ville-aux-Fayes the whole district had been poisoned against him by Gaubertin's efforts.

Sibilet's installation took place toward the end of the autumn of 1817. The year 1818 came and went, and the General never set foot on the estate. He was occupied by his own approaching marriage, which took place early in 1819, and he spent most of the summer in paying court to his betrothed in his future father-in-law's château near Alençon. Besides the Aigues and his splendid town house, General de Montcornet possessed an income of sixty thousand francs in the Funds, and drew the pay of a lieutenant-general on the reserve. Yet, although Napoleon had made the brilliant soldier a Count of the Empire, granting him for arms *a shield bearing four coats quarterly: the first, azure, on a desert or three pyramids argent; the second, sinople, three bugles argent; the third, gules, a cannon or, mounted on a gun carriage sable, in chief a crescent of the second; the fourth, or a crown sinople*, with the medieval sounding motto, *Sonnez la charge*, Montcornet was conscious that his father had been a cabinet-maker in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, a fact which he was perfectly willing to forget. Wherefore, consumed

with a desire to be a peer of France, he counted as naught his grand cordon of the Legion of Honor, his Cross of Saint-Louis, and a hundred and forty thousand francs of income. The demon of titles had bitten him, the sight of a blue ribbon drove him distracted, and the heroic fighter on Essling field would have lapped all the mud on the Pont Royal to gain an entrance into the set of the Navarreins, Lenoncourts, Maufrigneuses, d'Espards, and Vandenesses, the families of Grandlieu, Verneuil, d'Herouville, Chaulieu, and so forth.

In the year 1818, when it became plain to him that there was no hope of a return of the Bonapartes, Montcornet availed himself of the friendly offices of his friends' wives. Those ladies advertised in the Faubourg Saint-Germain that the General was ready to give heart and hand and fortune and a house in town as the price of an alliance with any great family whatsoever.

It was the Duchesse de Carigliano who succeeded after untold efforts in finding a suitable match in one of the three branches of the Troisville family, to wit, that of the Viscount who had been in the Russian service since 1789, and came back with the *émigrés* in 1815. The Viscount had only a younger brother's share when he married a Princesse Scherbellof with near a million to her fortune; but his estate had been burdened since by two sons and three daughters. His ancient and powerful family numbered among its members a peer of France, the Marquis de Troisville, head of the oldest branch; as well as two deputies, each with a numerous progeny all busy in getting their share out of the taxes, hangers-on attached to the ministry and the court, like gold-fishes about a crust. So as soon as Montcornet was introduced into this family by one of the most zealous Bourbon partisans among Napoleon's duchesses, he was well received. Montcornet asked, in return for his money and a blind affection for his wife, for a post in the Garde Royale, a marquis's patent, and to be in time a peer of France, but all that the Troisvilles promised him was the influence and support of their three branches.

"You know what that means," said the Maréchale to her old friend, complaining that the promise was rather vague. "No one can answer for the King; we can only prompt the Royal will."

Montcornet made Virginie de Troisville his residuary legatee in the marriage-contract. Completely subjugated by his wife, as explained by Blondet's letter, he was still without other heirs, but he had been presented at the court of Louis XVIII., and his Majesty had conferred the ribbon of Saint-Louis upon the old Bonapartist, and allowed him to quarter his preposterous scutcheon with the arms of Troisville; the marquisate and peerage were promised as rewards to future devotion.

But, a few days after the audience, the Duc de Berri was murdered, the Pavillon Marsan carried all before it, Villèle came into power, and all the Troisvilles' threads of diplomacy were broken off; new points of attachment must be found for them among the ministry.

"We must wait," said the Troisvilles, and Montcornet, overwhelmed as he was with civilities in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, waited. This was how the General came to stay away from the Aigues in 1818.

In his happiness (ineffable bliss for the shopkeeper's son from the Faubourg Saint-Antoine) with this young wife, highly bred, lively, and sweet-natured, he must shower all the delights of Paris upon the daughter of the Troisvilles, who had opened all doors in the Faubourg Saint-Germain to him; and these diverse joys so completely effaced the unpleasant scene with the steward from his mind that Gaubertin and his doings and his very name were quite forgotten.

In 1820 the General brought the Countess into the country to show her the Aigues, and passed Sibilet's accounts and ratified his actions without looking too closely into them. Happiness is no haggler. The Countess was delighted to find the steward's wife such a charming woman, and made presents to her and to the children, with whom she played for a little while. She also commanded some al-

terations in the house, and an architect was summoned from Paris; for she proposed (and the General was wild with joy at the thought) to spend six months out of the twelve in such a splendid abode. All the General's savings were spent on carrying out the architect's scheme and on the dainty furniture from Paris; and the Aigues received that final touch which stamped it as unique—a monument to the tastes of four different centuries.

In 1821 the General was almost summoned by Sibilet before the month of May. Weighty matters were at stake. The nine years' lease of the woods to a timber merchant, concluded by Gaubertin in 1812 at thirty thousand francs, expired on May 15th of that year. So, at first, Sibilet would not meddle in the matter of renewing the lease; he was jealous of his reputation for honesty. "You know, M. le Comte," he wrote, "that I have no finger in that pie." But the timber merchant wanted the indemnity which he had shared with Gaubertin, an exaction to which Mlle. Laguerre had submitted in her dislike of lawsuits. The excuse for the indemnity was based on the depredations of the peasantry, who behaved as if they had an established right to cut wood for fuel in the forest. Messrs. Gravelot Brothers, the timber merchants in Paris, declined to pay for the last quarter, and offered to bring experts to prove that the woods had fallen off one-fifth in their annual value; they argued from the bad precedent established by Mlle. Laguerre.

"I have already summoned these gentlemen to appear in the Court at Ville-aux-Fayes," so Sibilet's letter ran, "for on account of this lease; they have appointed their domicile with my old employer, Maître Corbinet. I am afraid we shall lose the day."

"Here is a matter in which our income is involved, fair lady," said the General, showing the letter to his wife; "do you mind going sooner than last year to the Aigues?"

"Do you go, and I will come down as soon as the summer begins," said the Countess, rather pleased with the prospect of staying behind in Paris by herself.

So the General set out alone. He was fully determined to take strong measures, for he knew the treacherous disease which was eating into the best of his revenues; but, as remains to be seen, the General reckoned without his Gaubertin.

VIII

THE GREAT REVOLUTIONS OF A LITTLE VALLEY

"*WELL, NOW*, Lawyer Sibilet," began the General on the morning after his arrival, addressing his steward by a familiar nickname, which showed how much he appreciated the legal knowledge of the quondam notary's clerk. "Well, Lawyer Sibilet, and so, in Ministerial language, we are 'passing through a crisis,' are we?"

"Yes, M. le Comte," replied Sibilet, following in the General's wake.

The happy proprietor of the Aigues was walking up and down before his steward's house, in a space where Mme. Sibilet's flowers were growing on the edge of the wide stretch of grass watered by the broad channel spoken of in Blondet's letter. The Aigues itself lay in full view of the garden, even as from the château you saw the steward's house, which had been built for the sake of its effect in the landscape.

"But where is the difficulty?" pursued the General. "I shall go through with the Gravelots' case; a wound in the purse is not mortal. And I will have the contract well advertised; we shall soon find out the real value of the lease by comparing the bids of the competitors."

"Things will not go off that way, M. le Comte," Sibilet answered. "If you have no offers, what will you do then?"

"Fell my timber and sell it myself."

"*You* turn timber merchant!" cried Sibilet, and saw that the General shrugged his shoulders. "I am quite willing.

Let us say no more about your affairs here. Let us look at Paris. You would have to take a timber yard on lease there, take out a license, pay taxes, pay lighterage, city dues, wharfingers and workmen, in short, you must have a responsible agent—"

"Quite out of the question!" the General hastily broke in in alarm. "But why should I have no bidders?"

"M. le Comte, you have enemies in the place."

"And who are they?"

"M. Gaubertin, first and foremost—"

"Oh! Is that the scamp who was here before your time?"

"Not so loud, M. le Comte!" entreated Sibilet in terror; "for pity's sake, do not speak so loud! My servant girl may overhear—"

"What!" returned the General, "cannot I talk on my own property of a scoundrel who robbed me?"

"If you value a quiet life, M. le Comte, come further away! . . . Now; M. Gaubertin is mayor of Ville-aux-Fayes."

"Aha! I wish Ville-aux-Fayes joy of him with all my heart. Thunder of heaven! He is a nice mayor for a place—!"

"Do me the honor of listening to me, M. le Comte, and, believe me, we have a most serious matter in hand, the question of your future here."

"I am listening. Let us sit down on this bench."

"When you dismissed Gaubertin, M. le Comte, he had to do something, for he was not rich—"

"Not rich! and he was helping himself here to twenty thousand francs a year!"

"M. le Comte, I am not setting out to justify his conduct," Sibilet resumed. "I should like to see the Aigues prosper, if it were only to establish the fact of Gaubertin's dishonesty; but we must not abuse him, he is the most dangerous rascal in all Burgundy, and he is in a position to do you a mischief."

"How?" asked the General, grown thoughtful.

"Gaubertin, such as you see him, is the general agent of the wood merchants, and controls one-third of the Paris timber trade; he directs the whole business in wood—the growth, felling, storage, canal-transport, and salvage. He is a constant employer of labor, and can dictate his own terms. It has taken him three years to make this position, but he has fortified himself in it by now; he is the man of all the timber merchants, and he treats them all alike. He has the whole thing cut and dried for their benefit; their business is done more smoothly and with less working expense than if each man employed a separate agent, as they used to do. For one thing, he has weeded out competition so thoroughly that he has a monopoly of contracts for timber, and the Crown forests are his preserves. The right of cutting timber in the Crown forests is put up periodically to auction, but practically it is in the hands of Gaubertin's clique of timber merchants, for by this time nobody is big enough to bid against them. Last year M. Mariotte of Auxerre, egged on by the Crown ranger, tried to outbid Gaubertin. Gaubertin let him have the trees at the ordinary price to begin with; then when it came to felling the woods the local wood-cutters wanted such wages that M. Mariotte had to send over to Auxerre for men, and when they came the Ville-aux-Fayes men set upon them. Then the ringleader of the union men and the leader of the brawl got into the police court. The proceedings cost money, and M. Mariotte had to pay all the costs, for the men had not a brass farthing. And let me tell you this, by the by (for you will have all the poor in the canton set against you)—you make nothing by taking the law of poor folk except ill-will, if you happen to live among them.

"And that was not the end of it. When poor old Mariotte (a decent soul) came to reckon it all over, he was out of pocket by the contract. He had to pay money down for everything, and to sell for credit; Gaubertin delivered timber at unheard-of prices to ruin his competitor; he actually gave it away at five per cent below cost price, and poor old Mariotte's credit was badly shaken. In fact, Gaubertin is

still after him at this day, and pesters him to that degree that he is going to leave not merely Auxerre, they say, but the department too, and he is doing wisely. So, at one blow, the growers were sacrificed for a long time to come to the timber merchants, who settle the prices among themselves, like brokers and furniture dealers in the Paris Sale Rooms. But Gaubertin saves the growers so much bother that it is worth their while to employ him."

"And how so?" asked the General.

"In the first place," said Sibilet, "anything that simplifies business is sooner or later to the interest of all concerned. Then the owners of forests are sure of their money. That is the great thing, as you will find out, in all sales of produce. And, lastly M. Gaubertin is like a father to the laborers; he pays them good wages, and finds them constant work; and as the wood-cutters' families live in the neighborhood, there is no damage done to the woods which belong to Gaubertin's timber merchants, or on the estates of Messieurs de Soulanges and de Ronquerolles and others who confide their interests to him. The peasants pick up the dead wood, and that is all."

"That rogue Gaubertin has not wasted his time!" cried the General.

"Oh! he is a sharp man!" said Sibilet. "He is, as he puts it, steward of the best half of the department now, instead of steward of the Aigues. He charges every one a trifling percentage, but that mere trifle on a couple of million francs brings him in forty or fifty thousand francs a year. 'The hearths of Paris pay for all,' says he. That is your enemy, M. le Comte. So my advice to you is to come to terms with him. He is hand and glove, as you know, with Soudry, the police sergeant at Soulanges, and with M. Rigou, our mayor at Blangy; the rural police are his tools, so that it will be hard to put down the pilfering which is eating you up. Your woods have been ruined, more particularly during the last two years; so Messieurs Gravelot have a chance in their favor, for they say that, 'by the

terms of the lease, you were to pay the expenses of protecting your property; you are not protecting it, so you are doing us an injury, and you must make good our damages.' Which is fair enough, but it is no reason why they should gain the day."

"You must resign yourself to a lawsuit and to a loss of money over it to prevent other lawsuits in future," said the General.

"You will delight Gaubertin," retorted Sibilet.

"How?"

"If you go to law with the Gravelots, you will measure yourself man to man with Gaubertin, who represents them; he would like nothing so much as that lawsuit. As he says, he flatters himself that he will trail you on to the Court of Appeal."

"Ah! the scoundrel! the—"

"Then if you fell and sell your own timber," pursued Sibilet, turning the dagger in the wound, "you will be in the hands of the laborers, who will ask you 'fancy prices,' instead of 'trade wages'; they will 'overweight' you, which means that they will put you in such a position that, like poor old Mariotte, you will have to sell at a loss. If you try to find a lessee, no one will make you an offer, for it stands to reason that no one will run the risk for a private estate that Mariotte ran for the Crown Forest.—Moreover, suppose that the old man goes to complain about his losses to the Department. There is an official there, much such a man as your humble servant used to be in his assessor days, a worthy gentleman in a threadbare coat, who sits and reads a newspaper at a table. He is neither more nor less soft-hearted, whether they pay him twelve hundred or twelve thousand francs. Talk to the Inland Revenue Department, in the person of this gentleman, of allowances and reductions! He will answer you, '*Fiddle-de-dee!*' while he cuts his pen. You are an outlaw, M. le Comte."

"What is to be done?" cried the General. His blood boiled; he strode up and down before the bench.

"M. le Comte," said Sibilet with brutal frankness, "what I am about to say is not in my own interests—you should sell the Aigues and leave the neighborhood."

At those words the General started back as if a bullet had struck him. He looked at Sibilet with a diplomatic expression.

"Is a general of the Imperial Guard to run away from such rogues; and after Mme. la Comtesse has taken a liking to the Aigues? Before I would do that I would force Gaubertin to fight me, give him a box on the ears in the market-place of Ville-aux-Fayes, and kill him like a dog."

"Gaubertin is not such a fool as to come into collision with you. And besides, so important a person as the mayor of Ville-aux-Fayes cannot be insulted with impunity."

"I will make a beggar of him; the Troisvilles will back me up; my income is involved."

"You will not succeed in that, M. le Comte; Gaubertin has very long arms. You would only put yourself in an awkward predicament with no possible way out—"

"And how about this lawsuit?" said the General. "We must think of the present."

"M. le Comte, I will insure that you shall gain it," said Sibilet, with something knowing in his air.

"Well done, Sibilet!" said the General, gripping the steward's hand. "And how?"

"You would gain the day in the Court of Appeal in the ordinary course of events. In my opinion, the Gravelots are in the right, but that is not enough, the case is not decided upon its merits; you must be technically in the right as well. The Gravelots have not observed the proper formalities, and a case always turns upon a question of that kind. The Gravelots ought to have given you notice to look after your woods better. Then you cannot come down upon people for allowances extending over a period of nine years at the expiration of a lease; there is a guarding clause inserted in the lease to prevent that. You will lose your case at Ville-

aux-Fayes; perhaps you will lose it again in the higher court, but you will gain the day in Paris. You will be put to ruinous expense; there will be valuations which will cost a great deal. If you gain the case, you will spend twelve or fifteen thousand francs at least over it; but you will gain the day if you are bent upon so doing. The lawsuit will not mend matters with the Gravelots; it will cost them even more. You will be a bugbear to them, you will get a name for being litigious, you will be slandered, but you will gain the day—"

"What is to be done?" repeated the General. If Sibilet's remarks had touched upon the most heart-burning questions, they could not have produced more effect on Montcornet. He bethought himself of that thrashing administered to Gaubertin, and heartily wished that he had laid the horsewhip about his own shoulders. He turned a face on fire to Sibilet, who could read all his torments plainly there.

"What is to be done, M. le Comte?" echoed the other. "There is only one thing to be done. Compound with the Gravelots, but you cannot do it in person. I must act as if I were robbing you. Now, when all our comfort and all our prospects lie in our integrity, it is rather hard for us poor devils to submit to appear dishonest. We are always judged by appearances. Gaubertin, in his time, saved Mlle. Laguerre's life, and he to all appearance robbed her; but she rewarded him for his devotion by putting him down in her will for a jewel worth ten thousand francs, which Mme. Gaubertin wears on her forehead at this day."

The General gave Sibilet a second glance, at least as diplomatic as the first, but the steward did not seem to feel the suspicion lurking beneath smiling good nature.

"My dishonesty will put M. Gaubertin in such high good humor, that I shall gain his goodwill," continued Sibilet. "He will listen with all his ears, too, when I come to lay this before him—'I can get twenty thousand francs out of the Count for the Gravelots, provided that they will

go halves with me.' If your opponents consent to that, I will bring you back the ten thousand francs. You only lose ten thousand, you save appearances, and there is an end of the lawsuit."

"You are a good fellow, Sibilet," said the General, grasping the steward's hand. "If you can arrange for the future as well as for the present, I consider that you are a jewel of a land-steward—"

"As to the future, you will not starve if the wood is not felled for the next two or three years. Begin by looking after your woods. Between then and now a good deal of water will have flowed down the Avonne, Gaubertin may die, or he may have made enough to retire upon. In short, you will have time to find a competitor; the loaf is big enough to divide; you will find another Gaubertin to match him."

"Sibilet," said the old warrior, amazed at the variety of solutions, "I will give you a thousand crowns if you bring the matter to an end in this way; and then we will think things over."

"Look after your woods before all things, M. le Comte. Go and see for yourself what the peasants have done there during the two years while you have been away. What could I do? I am a steward, not a keeper. You want three foresters and a mounted patrol to look after the Aigues."

"We will defend ourselves. If war it is to be, we will fight. That does not frighten *me*," said Montcornet, rubbing his hands.

"It is a money war," said Sibilet, "and that will seem harder to you than the other kind. You can kill men, but there is no killing men's interests. You will fight it out on a battlefield where all landowners must fight—called *realization*. It is nothing to grow this and that; you must sell your produce, and if you mean to sell it you must keep on good terms with everybody."

"I shall have the country people on my side."

"How so?" queried Sibilet.

"By treating them kindly."

"Treat the peasants kindly and the townspeople at Soulanges!" cried Sibilet, squinting hideously, for one eye seemed to gleam more than the other with the irony in his words. "You do not know, sir, what you are setting about. Our Lord Jesus Christ would be crucified there a second time. If you want a quiet life, M. le Comte, do as the late Mlle. Laguerre did—and let them rob you, or else strike terror into them. The people, women and children, are all governed in the same way—by terror. That was the grand secret of the Convention and of the Emperor."

"Oh, come now! have we fallen among thieves here?" cried Montcornet.

Adeline came out to them.

"Your breakfast is waiting, dear," she said to Sibilet. "I beg your pardon, M. le Comte, but he has had nothing this morning, and he has been as far as Ronquerolles with some corn."

"Go, by all means, Sibilet."

Montcornet was up and out before day next morning. He chose to return by the Avonne gate to have a chat with his one forester, and to sound the man's disposition.

Some seven or eight acres of forest lay beside the Avonne; a fringe of tall forest trees had been left along the bank on either side, that a river which flowed almost in a straight line for three leagues might preserve its stately character.

The Aigues had once belonged to a mistress of Henri IV., who loved the chase as passionately as the Béarnais. It was she who built, in 1593, the steep, single-span bridge over the Avonne to cross over to the much larger forest purchased for her on the other side of the river. The Avonne gate had been built at the same time as a *rendezvous* for the hunt, and every one knows that architects in those times lavished all magnificence upon edifices reared for this great-

est pleasure of kings and princes. Six avenues met before it in a semicircular space, and in the centre of the crescent rose an obelisk surmounted by a sun once gilded, with the arms of Navarre on the one side, and those of the Comtesse de Moret on the other.

A corresponding crescent-shaped space by the Avonne communicated with the first by a broad, straight walk, whence you saw the angular crown of the Venetian-looking bridge. Between two handsome iron railings (resembling the magnificent ironwork which used to surround the Jardin de la Place Royale in Paris, now, alas! destroyed) stood a hunting-lodge built of brick, with stone string courses of the same depressed-pyramid pattern as at the château, stone facings likewise ornamented, and a high-pitched roof.

This bygone style, that gave the house the look of a royal hunting-lodge, is only suitable in towns for prisons, but here the background of forest trees set off its peculiarly grandiose character. The kennels, pheasant-houses, and the old quarters of falconers and prickers were screened by a blind wall. The place had once been the pride of Burgundy; now it lay almost in ruins.

In 1595 a royal train set out from that princely hunting-lodge, preceded by the great hounds beloved of Rubens and Paul Veronese; the horses that pawed the ground are now only seen in Wouvermans' wonderful pictures—mighty white beasts with a bluish shade on the heavy glossy hindquarters. After these followed footmen in gorgeous array, and the foreground was enlivened by the huntsmen in yellow breeches and high topboots who fill Van de Meulen's great canvases. The stone obelisk was reared to commemorate that day when the Béarnais went hunting with the beautiful Comtesse de Moret, and bore the date beneath the arms of Navarre. Navarre, not France; for the jealous mistress, whose son was declared to be a prince of the blood, could not endure that the arms of France should meet her eyes to reproach her.

But in 1823, when the General saw the splendid monument, the roof was green with moss on every side. The octagonal glass panes were dropping out of the loosened leads, the windows looked half-blind. The stones of the weather-worn string-courses seemed to cry out, with countless gaping mouths, against such desecration. Yellow wall-flowers blossomed among the balusters; the ivy stems slipped pale down-covered claws into every cranny.

Everything spoke of a mean neglect. Selfishness, regardless of those to come after it, leaves its stamp on all its present possessions. Two windows above were stopped up with hay; one window on the ground floor gave a glimpse of a room full of tools and firewood, and a cow's muzzle thrust from another informed the beholder that, to save himself the trouble of going to and fro between the pheasant-house and the lodge, Courtecuisse had made a cowhouse of the great hall, where the armorial bearings of every owner of the Aigues were painted on the panelled ceiling.

The whole approach to the house was disfigured by a collection of dirty black palings marking the limits of pigsties roofed with planks, and little square pens for poultry and ducks. Every six months the accumulated filth was cleared away. Sundry rags were drying on the brambles which had thrust themselves up here and there.

As the General came up the avenue from the bridge, he saw Courtecuisse's wife scouring the earthen pipkin in which she had just made coffee. The keeper himself was sitting on a chair in the sun looking on, much as a savage might watch his squaw. He turned his head at the sound of footsteps, saw the Count his master, and looked foolish.

"Well, Courtecuisse, my boy, I don't wonder that some one else cuts down my wood before the Messrs. Gravelot can get it. Do you take your place for a sinecure?"

"Upon my word, M. le Comte, I have been out in your woods for so many nights that I have got a chill. I was feeling so bad this morning that my wife has been warming a poultice for me; she is cleaning the pipkin now."

"My good fellow," remarked the General, "I only know of one complaint which needs poulticing with hot coffee, and that is hunger. Listen, you rogue! Yesterday I went through the woods belonging to Messrs. de Ronquerolles and de Soulanges, and then through my own. Theirs are properly looked after, and mine is in a pitiable staté."

"Ah! M. le Comte, *they* have been here this ever so long, they have; people let them alone. Would you have me fight with half a dozen communes? I value my life even more than your woods. Any man who tried to look after your woods properly would get a bullet through his head by way of wages in some corner of the forest."

"Coward!" cried the General, choking down the wrath kindled by Courtecuisse's insolence. "It has been a splendid night, but it has cost me three hundred francs at this moment and a thousand francs in claims for damages to come.—Things must be done differently, or you shall go out of this. All past offences should be forgiven. Here are my conditions: you shall have all the fines and three francs for each conviction. If I do not find that this plan pays me better, you shall go about your business; while if you serve me well, and manage to put down the pilfering, you shall have a hundred crowns a year. Think it over. Here are six ways," he went on, pointing to the alleys, "like me, you must take one; I am not afraid of bullets. Try to find the right one."

Courtecuisse, forty-six years of age, a short man with a full-moon countenance, dearly loved to do nothing. He reckoned upon spending the rest of his days in the hunting lodge —*his* lodge. His two cows grazed in the forest, he had fuel for his needs; he worked in his garden instead of running about after delinquents. His neglect of his duties suited Gaubertin, and Courtecuisse and Gaubertin understood each other. So he never harassed the wood-stealers except to gratify his own petty hatreds. He persecuted girls who would not accede to his wishes, and people whom he disliked; but it was a long while now since he

had borne any one a grudge, his easy ways had won popularity for him.

At the Grand-I-Vert a knife and fork was always set for Courtecuisse, the fagot-stealers were no longer recalcitrant. Both he and his wife received tribute in kind from the marauders. This wood was stacked for him, his vines were layered and pruned. He had vassals and tributaries in all the delinquents in fact.

Almost reassured as he had been as to his future by the words that Gaubertin let fall about those two acres to be his when the Aigues should be sold, he was rudely awakened from his dream by the General's dry remarks. After four years *he* stood revealed at last; the nature of the bourgeois had come out; he was determined to be cheated no longer. Courtecuisse took up his cap, his game-bag and gun, put on his gaiters, his belt stamped with the brand-new arms of Montcornet, and went forth to Ville-aux-Fayes, with the careless gait which hides the countryman's deepest thoughts. He looked along the woods as he went and whistled to his dogs.

"You complain of the Upholsterer," said Gaubertin, when Courtecuisse had told his tale; "why, your fortune is made! What! the ninny is giving you three francs for each prosecution and all the fines into the bargain, is he? If you can come to an understanding with your friends, he can have them, and as many as he likes. Prosecutions! let him have them by the hundred. When you have a thousand francs, you will be able to buy the *Bâchelerie*, Rigou's farm; you can be your own master and work on your own land, or rather, you can live at ease and set others to work. Only, mind this, you must arrange to prosecute nobody but those who are as poor as Job. You cannot shear those that have no wool. Take the Upholsterer's offer; let him pile up costs for himself if he has a liking for them. Tastes differ, and it takes all sorts to make a world. There was old Mariotte, in spite of all I could say, he liked losses better than profits."

Courtecuisse went home again, profoundly impressed by Gaubertin's wisdom and consumed with a desire to have a bit of land for himself and to be a master like the rest at last.

General Montcornet likewise returned, and on his way gave Sibilet an account of his expedition.

"Quite right, quite right, M. le Comte," said the steward, rubbing his hands, "but there must be no stopping short now you are on the right track. The rural policeman who allowed the spoliation to go on in our fields ought to be changed. It would be easy for M. le Comte to obtain the appointment of mayor of the commune, and to put some one else in Vaudoyer's place—some old soldier who would not be afraid to carry out orders. A great landowner should be master on his own property; and see what trouble we have with the present mayor!"

The mayor of the commune of Blangy, one Rigou, had been a Benedictine monk, but in the year 1 of the Republic he had married the servant-maid of the late cure of Blangy. A married monk was not likely to find much favor at the prefecture after the Restoration, but there was no one else to fill his post, and in 1815 Rigou was still mayor of Blangy. In 1817, however, the bishop had sent the Abbe Brossette to act as officiating priest of the parish. Blangy had done without a priest for twenty-five years, and, not unnaturally, a violent feud broke out between the apostate and the young churchman whose character has been previously sketched.

People had looked down upon Rigou, but the war between the mayor and the parson brought the former popularity. Rigou had been hated by the peasants for his usurious schemes, but now he was suddenly identified with their interests, political and financial, which were threatened (as they imagined) by the Restoration and the clergy.

Socquard of the Cafe de la Paix was the nominal subscriber to the "Constitutionnel," the principal Liberal paper, but all the local functionaries joined in the subscription, and the journal circulated through a score of hands after it left

the Cafe till, at the end of the week, it came to Rigou, who passed it on to Langlumé, the miller, who gave the tattered fragments to any one who could read. The leading articles, written for Paris and the anti-religious *canards*, were seriously read and considered in the valley of the Aigues. Rigou became a hero after the pattern of the "venerable" Abbe Grégoire; and as in the case of certain Parisian bankers, the purple cloak of popularity served to hide a multitude of sins.

At this particular moment, indeed, Rigou, the perjured monk, was looked upon as a local François Keller and a champion of the people, though at no very remote period he would not have dared to walk in the fields after dark lest he should be trapped and die an accidental death. Persecution for political opinion has such virtue that not merely does it increase a man's present importance, but it restores innocence to his past. Liberalism worked many miracles of this kind. But the unlucky paper, which had the wit to find the level of its readers in those days, and to be as dull, scandalous, gullible and besottedly disloyal as the ordinary public, of which the ordinary rank and file of mankind is composed, did, it may be, as much damage to private property as to the Church which it attacked.

Rigou flattered himself that a son of the people, reared by the Revolution, a Bonapartist general, in disgrace to boot, would be a sworn enemy of Bourbons and clericals. But the General had his own ideas, and had managed to avoid a visit from M. and Mme. Rigou when he first came to the Aigues.

The enormity of the General's blunder, afterward made worse by a piece of insolence on the part of the Countess (the story will be related in its place) can only be recognized after a better acquaintance with the terrible figure of Rigou—the vampire of the valley.

If Montcornet had set out to win the mayor's goodwill, and courted his friendship, Rigou's influence might have neutralized Gaubertin's power. But far from making the overtures, Montcornet had brought three several actions

against the ex-monk in the court of Ville-aux-Fayes; Rigou had already gained one case, but the other two were still in suspense. Then Montcornet's mind had been so busied over schemes for the gratification of his vanity, so full of his marriage, that he had forgotten Rigou; but now when Sibilet advised him to take Rigou's place himself, he called for post-horses and went straight to the prefect.

The General and the prefect, Count Martial de la Roche-Hugon, had been friends since the year 1804. The purchase of the Aigues had been determined by a hint let fall in Paris by the Councillor of State. La Roche-Hugon had been a prefect under Napoleon, and remained a prefect under the Bourbons, paying court to the Bishop so as to keep his place. Now his lordship had asked for Rigou's removal not once but many times, and Martial, who knew perfectly well how matters stood in the commune, was only too delighted by the General's request. In a month's time, Montcornet was mayor of Blangy.

While Montcornet was staying with his friend at the prefecture, it happened naturally enough that one Groison, a subaltern officer of the old Imperial Guard, came thither about his pension, which had been stopped on some pretext. The General had once already done the man a service, and, recollecting this, the gallant cavalry officer poured out the story of his woes. He had nothing whatever. Montcornet undertook to obtain the pension, and offered Groison the post of rural policeman at Blangy, and a way at the same time of repaying the obligation by devotion to his patron's interests. So the new mayor and the new rural policeman came into office together, and, as may be imagined, the General gave weighty counsel to his lieutenant.

Vaudoyer, whose bread was thus taken out of his mouth, was a peasant born on the Ronquerolles estate. He was the ordinary rural policeman, fit for nothing but to dawdle about and to make use of his position, so that he was made much of and cajoled by the peasants, who ask no better than to bribe subaltern authority and outpost sentinels of property.

Vaudoyer knew Soudry; for a police sergeant in the gendarmerie fulfils quasi-judicial functions, and the rural police naturally act as detectives if required. Soudry sent his man to Gaubertin, who gave a warm welcome to an old acquaintance, and the pair discussed Vaudoyer's wrongs over a friendly glass.

"My dear fellow," said the mayor of Ville-aux-Fayes, who could suit himself to his company, "the thing that has happened to you is in store for us all. The nobles have come back again, and the Emperor's nobles are making common cause with them. They mean to grind the people down, to establish the old customs and to take away our property; but we are Burgundians, we must defend ourselves and send those *Arminacs* back to Paris. You go back to Blangy; you can be watchman there for M. Polissard, who has taken the lease of the Ronquerolles woods. Never mind, my lad, I will find you plenty of work all the year round. But there is to be no trespassing there, mind you; the woods belong to *us*, and that would spoil it all. Send on all 'wood-cutters' to the Aigues. And lastly, if there is any sale for fagots, tell the people to buy of us and not of the Aigues. You will be rural policeman again; this won't last long. The General will soon be sick of living among thieves. Did you know that yonder Upholsterer called me a thief? And I the son of one of the most honest Republicans! and the son-in-law of Mouchon, the famous representative of the people, who died without leaving a penny to pay for his funeral!"

The General raised *his* rural policeman's salary to three hundred francs a year. He had a *mairie* built in Blangy, and installed Groison in the premises. Then he found a wife for that functionary in the orphan daughter of one of his own little tenants who owned three acres of vineyard. Groison felt a doglike affection for his master. His fidelity was admitted on all sides, and Groison was feared and respected, but much as an unpopular captain is respected and feared by his crew. The peasantry shunned him as if he had been

a leper. They were silent when he came among them, or they disguised their dislike under an appearance of banter. Against such numbers he was powerless.

The delinquents amused themselves by inventing misdemeanors of which no cognizance could be taken, and the old warrior chafed at his impotence. For Groison his functions united the attractions of guerilla warfare with the pleasures of the chase. He hunted down offenders. But war had instilled into him the sportsmanlike instinct of acting openly and above-board, as it were, and he loathed the underhand schemings and thievish dexterity which caused him continual mortification. He very soon found out that the property of other landlords was respected, that it was only at the Aigues that this pilfering went on, and he felt sincere contempt for a peasantry ungrateful enough to rob a general of the Empire, a man so essentially kind-hearted and generous. Hate was soon added to contempt. But in vain did he try to be omnipresent; he could not be everywhere at once; and the delinquencies went on all over the woods at the same time. Groison made it plain to the General that he must organize a complete system of defence; his utmost zeal, he said, was insufficient to cope with the ill-will of the population of the valley, and he revealed its extent.

"There is something behind this, General," he said; "these people are too bold, they are afraid of nothing; it is as if they reckoned on Providence."

"We shall see," said the Count.

Unlucky words! A great statesman does not conjugate the verb "to see" in the future tense.

At that time Montcornet had something else on his mind, a difficulty more pressing, as it seemed to him. He must find an *alter ego* to take his place as mayor while he was absent in Paris, and a mayor must of necessity be able to read and write. Looking over the whole commune, he found but one man to answer this description—this was Langlumé, the miller. He could not well have made a worse choice.

In the first place, the interests of the General-mayor and

the miller-deupty-mayor were diametrically opposed; and, in the second, Langlumé was mixed up in several shady transactions with Rigou, who lent him money in the way of business. The miller used to buy the right of pasture for his horses in the fields; thanks to his machinations indeed he had a monopoly, for Sibilet could not find another purchaser. All the grazing land in the valley commanded good prices, but the fields at the Aigues, the best land of all, was left to the last and fetched the least.

So Langlumé was appointed deputy-mayor for the time being, but in France "for the time being" practically means "once for all," though Frenchmen are credited with a love of change. Langlumé, counselled by Rigou, feigned devotion to the General's interests, and became deputy-mayor about the time selected by the omnipotent chronicler for the beginning of the drama.

As soon as the new mayor had turned his back, Rigou, who of course was on the Council, had it all his own way at the Board, and the resolutions which he passed there were by no means in the General's interest. He voted money for schemes purely for the benefit of the peasants, though the Aigues must pay most of the rates, and indeed paid two-thirds of the taxes, or he refused grants of money which were really needed for supplementing the Abbe's stipend, for rebuilding the parsonage, or wages (*sic*) for a schoolmaster.

"If the peasants knew how to read and write, what would become of us?" said Langlumé, with ingenuous frankness. The Abbe Brossette had tried to induce a brother of the Order of the *Doctrine chrétienne* to come to Blangy, and the miller was endeavoring to justify to the General the anti-Liberal course taken by the Council.

The General returned from Paris, and so delighted was he with Groison's behavior that he began to look up old soldiers of the Imperial Guard. He meant to organize his defence of the Aigues and put it on a formidable footing. By dint of looking about him, and making inquiries among his friends

and officers on half-pay, he unearthed Michaud, an old quartermaster in the cuirassiers of the Guard, "a tough morsel," in soldier's language, a simile suggested by camp cookery, when a bean here and there resists the softening influences of the boiling pot. Michaud picked out three of his acquaintances to be foresters, without fear or blame.

The first of these, Steingel by name, was a thorough Alsacian, an illegitimate son of the general Steingel who fell during the time of Bonaparte's early successes in Italy. Steingel the younger was tall and strong, a soldier of a type accustomed, like the Russians, to complete and passive obedience. Nothing stopped him in his duty. If he had had his orders, he would have laid hands coolly on Emperor or Pope. He did not know what danger meant. He had served in the ranks with undaunted courage for sixteen years, and had never received a scratch. He slept out of doors or in his bed with stoical indifference, and at any aggravation of discomfort merely remarked, "That is how things are to-day, it seems!"

Vatel, the second, was the child of his regiment; a corporal of light infantry, gay as a lark, a trifle light with the fair sex, utterly devoid of religious principle, and brave to the verge of rashness, the man who would laugh as he shot down a comrade. He had no future before him, no idea of a calling, he saw a very amusing little war in the functions proposed to him; and as the Emperor and the Grand Army were his sole articles of faith, he swore to serve the brave Montcornet if the whole world were against him. His was a nature essentially combative; life without an enemy lost all its savor for him; he would have made an excellent attorney; he was a born detective. Indeed, as has been seen, but for the presence of the justice's clerk, he would have haled Granny Tonsard, fagot and all, out of the Grand-I-Vert, and the law in his person would have violated the sanctuary of the hearth.

The third, one Gaillard, a veteran promoted to be sub-lieutenant, and covered with scars, belonged to the laboring

class of soldiers. Everything seemed to him to be alike indifferent after the Emperor's fate; but his indifference would carry him as far as Vatel's enthusiasm. He had a natural daughter to support, the place offered him a means of subsistence, and he took it as he would have enlisted in a regiment.

When the General went to the Aigues to dismiss Courtecuisse before his old soldiers came, he was amazed beyond expression at the man's impudent audacity. There are ways of obeying an order which supply a most cuttingly sarcastic commentary upon it, on the part of the slave who carries it out to the letter. Every relation between man and man can be reduced to an absurdity, and Courtecuisse had overstepped the limits of absurdity.

One hundred and twenty-six summonses had been taken out at the tribunal of the peace at Soulanges, which took cognizance of misdemeanors; and almost every one of the delinquents had an understanding with Courtecuisse. In sixty-nine cases judgment had been given, and duly registered and notices served upon the defendants. Whereupon Brunet, delighted at such a fine windfall, did all that was necessary to arrive at the dreary point beyond which the arm of the law cannot reach, whence execution warrants return bearing the superscription "No effects," a formula by which the sheriff's officer acquaints you with the fact that the person herein described, being in the direst poverty, is already stripped bare of all possessions, and where there is nothing to be had, the creditor, like the crown, loses his rights—of suing. In the present instance the poverty-stricken individuals had been selected with discernment. They lived scattered over five communes round about; and when the sheriff's officer and his two assistants, Vermichel and Fourchon, had duly gone to find each one, Brunet returned the warrants to Sibilet, together with a statement of costs amounting to five thousand francs, and an intimation that he awaited the Comte de Montcornet's further instructions.

Provided with this file of documents, Sibilet waited on

his employer, calmly pointed out that these were the results of a too summary order given to Courtecuisse, and was looking on, an unconcerned spectator of one of the most tremendous explosions of wrath ever seen in a French cavalry officer, when Courtecuisse came in at that particular moment to pay his respects and to ask for some eleven hundred francs, the promised bonus on these unlucky convictions. Then temper fairly got the upper hand of the General. He forgot his rank in the army, he forgot his count's coronet, and became a plain trooper again, and poured out a torrent of insulting invective of which he would feel heartily ashamed a little later.

"Oh! eleven hundred francs?" cried he. "Eleven hundred thousand drubbings! Eleven hundred thousand kicks! . . . Do you suppose that I am not up to your games? . . . Show me a clean pair of heels or I will break every bone in your skin!"

At the sight of the General, grown purple in the face, at the sound of the first words he uttered, Courtecuisse fled away like a swallow.

"M. le Comte," said Sibilet, in the mildest accents, "you are wrong."

"Wrong! . . . *I?*"

"Good gracious, M. le Comte, mind what you are about; that rogue will prosecute you—"

"I do not care a rap. . . . Look here! that scoundrel goes this very moment. See that he takes nothing of mine away with him, and pay him his wages."

Four hours later every tongue in the neighborhood was wagging, as might be expected, over the news. It was said that the General had refused to pay Courtecuisse's wages, poor fellow; had kept two thousand francs belonging to him, and knocked him down.

Queer stories began to circulate. According to the latest reports, the master up at the Aigues had gone out of his mind. Next day Brunet, who had drawn up the execution warrants for the General, served him with a summons

to appear before the tribunal. The lion had many fly-pricks in store for him, and this was but the beginning of his troubles.

There are various forms to be gone through before a forester can be installed; for one thing, he must take the oath in a Court of First Instance. Several days elapsed, therefore, before the three new foresters were properly qualified officials. The General had written to Michaud. He and his newly-married wife must come at once, though the lodge was not yet ready for them; but the future head-forester was too busy to leave Paris, his wife's relations had come for the wedding, and it was impossible for him to get away for another fortnight. All through that fortnight, and while the formalities were being completed, with no good grace, at Ville-aux-Fayes, the wood-stealing was in full swing, there was no one in charge of the forest, and the marauders made the utmost of their opportunities.

The sudden portent of three new foresters made a great sensation in the valley from Conches to Ville-aux-Fayes. There was that in the appearance of the three stalwart figures, clad in a grand green uniform (the Emperor's color) which plainly said that these were stout fellows, active and sturdy-legged, the sort of men who might be expected to spend their nights in the forest.

There was but one in the whole canton to give the veterans a welcome, and that one was Groison, the rural policeman. In his delight at such reinforcements he let drop a few threatening hints, how that before long the thieves should find themselves in a tight place, and unable to do any mischief. So the formal declâration of war was not omitted in this covert but fierce struggle.

Then Sibilet called the Count's attention to another fact, to wit, that the gendarmerie at Soulanges in general and police sergeant Soudry in particular were in reality his uncompromising foes, and pointed out how useful a brigade might be, if imbued with the proper spirit.

"With the right kind of corporal and gendarmes devoted

to your interests, you could do as you liked with the neighborhood," said he.

The Count hurried to the prefecture, and at his instance the divisionary commandant put Soudry on the retired list, and replaced him by one Viollet, a gendarme from the market town. The man bore an excellent character, and both commandant and prefect commended him highly. The whole Soulanges brigade was broken up and distributed over the department by the colonel of gendarmerie (one of Montcornet's old chums), and a new brigade was reconstructed of picked men, who received secret instructions to see that Montcornet's property was not attacked in future, together with a particular caution not to allow the inhabitants of Soulanges to gain them over.

This last revolution was accomplished so quickly that it was impossible to thwart it; it spread dismay through Ville-aux-Fayes and Soulanges. Soudry regarded himself as absolutely destitute, and bitter were his complaints, till Gaubertin contrived to carry his appointment as mayor, so that the control of the gendarmerie might still be in his hands.

Great was the outcry against this tyranny. Montcornet was generally hated. It was not merely that he had changed the course of half-a-dozen human lives, he had wounded the vanity of several fellow-creatures; and the peasantry, excited by hints dropped by the townspeople at Soulanges and Ville-aux-Fayes, or uttered by Rigou, Langlumé, or Guerbet (the postmaster at Conches), imagined that they were about to lose their "rights," as they called them.

The General hushed up the dispute with his sometime forester by paying all claims in full; and as for Courtecuisse, he gave two thousand francs for a little bit of land that lay by a cover side, within the Montcornet estate. Old Rigou, who could never be persuaded to part with the *Bâchelerie* (as it was called), took a malicious pleasure in selling it now to Courtecuisse at a profit of fifty per cent. The ex-forester, moreover, became one of Rigou's many creatures,

for he only paid down half the purchase-money, and the unpaid half gave the old money-lender a hold upon him.

Then began a life of guerilla warfare for Michaud, his three foresters, and Groison. Unweariedly they tramped through the woods, lay out in them of nights, and set themselves to acquire that intimate knowledge which is the forest-keeper's science, and economizes his time. They watched the outlets, grew familiar with the localities of the timber, trained their ears to detect the meaning of every crash of boughs, of every different forest sound. Then they studied all the faces of the neighborhood, the different families of the various villages were all passed in review, the habits and characters of the different individuals were noted, together with the ways in which they worked for a living. And all this was a harder task than you may imagine. The peasants who lived on the Aigues, seeing how carefully these new measures had been concerted, opposed a dumb resistance, a feint of acquiescence which baffled this intelligent police supervision.

Michaud and Sibilet took a dislike to each other from the very first. The steward's discontented looks, his combined sleekness and gruff manner were hateful to the straightforward outspoken soldier, the flower of the Young Guard. At first sight of his colleague he called him "a queer fish" in his own mind. It was not lost upon him that Sibilet always raised objections whenever any measure was proposed which went to the root of the mischief, and invariably advocated courses where success was doubtful. Instead of calming the General, Sibilet continually irritated him, as this brief sketch must have shown already; he was always urging him to take strong measures, always trying to frighten him by multiplying trouble, by making the most of trifles, by confronting him with old difficulties which sprang up again unconquered. Michaud did not guess that Sibilet had deliberately accepted the part of spy on Montcornet and evil genius; that ever since his installation he had made up his mind to serve two masters, and finally to

choose the one that best suited his interests—Montcornet or Gaubertin; but the soldier saw very plainly the steward's grasping and base nature, and could in no wise square this with honesty of purpose. Nor was the deep-seated aversion which separated the pair altogether displeasing to Montcornet. Michaud's personal dislike led him to watch the steward as he would never have condescended to do had the General asked him. And as for Sibilet, he fawned on the head-forester and cringed to him, yet could not induce the true-hearted soldier to lay aside the excessive civility which he set as a barrier between them.

After these explanatory details the position of the General's various enemies, and the drift of his conversation with his two ministers, ought to be perfectly intelligible.

IX

OF MEDIOCRACY

"*WELL, MICHAUD*, is it anything new?" asked Montcornet, after the Countess had left the dining-room.

"If you will take my advice, General, we will not talk of business here; walls have ears, and I should like to feel sure that what we are going to say will fall into none but our own."

"Very well," said the General; "then let us go out and walk along the field-path toward Sibilet's house; we may be sure that no one will overhear us there."

A few minutes later, while the Countess went to the Avonne gate with the Abbé Brossette and Blondet, the General strolled through the fields with Sibilet and Michaud, and heard the history of the affair at the Grand-I-Vert.

"Vatel was in the wrong," was Sibilet's comment.

"They made him see that pretty clearly by blinding

him," returned Michaud. "But that is nothing. You know our plan of taking the cattle of the convicted delinquents, General? Well, we shall never succeed. Brunet and his colleague Plissoud likewise will never co-operate loyally with us. They will always contrive to warn the people beforehand. Vermichel, Brunet's assistant bailiff, went to find old Fourchon at the Grand-I-Vert. Marie Tonsard is Bonnébault's sweetheart, so as soon as she heard about it she went to give the alarm at Conches. As a matter of fact the depredations are beginning again."

"Some very decided step is more and more called for every day," said Sibilet.

"What did I tell you?" cried the General. "Those judgments which condemned the offender to imprisonment in lieu of a fine must be enforced. If they do not pay me damages and costs they shall go to prison instead."

"They think that the law cannot touch them, and say among themselves that no one will dare to arrest them," Sibilet answered. "They fancy that they can frighten you! Some one backs them at Ville-aux-Fayes, for the public prosecutor seems to have forgotten the matter of the condemnations."

"I believe," said Michaud, seeing that the General looked thoughtful, "that by going to a good deal of expense you may still save your property."

"Better spend money than proceed to extreme measures," said Sibilet.

"Then what is your plan?" Montcornet asked, turning to his head-forester.

"It is quite simple," said Michaud; "it is a question of inclosing your park. We should be left in peace then, for any trifling damage done to the woods would be a criminal offence, and as such would be sent to the court of assize for trial."

Sibilet laughed. "At nine francs per rod the building materials alone would cost one-third of the actual value of the property," he said.

"There, there!" Montcornet broke in. "I shall go at once, and see the attorney-general."

"The attorney-general may be of the same opinion as the public prosecutor," Sibilet remarked suavely; "such negligence looks as if there was an understanding between the two."

"Very good, that remains to be found out!" cried Montcornet. "If everybody has to be sent packing, judges, public prosecutor, and the rest of them, attorney-general and all; I shall go if need be to the Keeper of the Seals about it, or to the King himself!"

A piece of energetic pantomime on Michaud's part made the General turn round upon Sibilet with a "Good day, my dear sir." The steward took the hint.

"Is it M. le Comte's intention as mayor," he said as he took leave, "to take the necessary steps toward putting a stop to the abuse of gleaning? The harvest is about to begin, and if public notice is to be given that no one will be allowed to glean unless they belong to the commune, and are duly provided with a certificate, we have no time to lose."

"You and Groison settle it between you!" answered the General. "In dealing with such people as these, the law must be carried out to the letter."

And so in a moment of vexation the system which Sibilet had vainly urged for a fortnight gained the day, and found favor in Montcornet's eyes during the heat of anger caused by Vatel's mishap.

When Sibilet was a hundred paces away, the Count spoke in a low voice to his head-forester.

"Well, Michaud, my good fellow, what is the matter?"

"You have an enemy in your own household, General, and you trust him with plans that you ought not to tell to your own foraging cap."

"I share your suspicions, my good friend," Montcornet answered, "but I will not make the same mistake twice. I am waiting till you understand the management to put you

in Sibilet's place, and Vatel can take yours. And yet, what fault have I to find with Sibilet? He is accurate and honest; so far he has not appropriated a hundred francs, and he has been here for five years. His nature is as odious as it can possibly be, and all is said. Besides, what object has he to gain?"

"He most certainly has one, General," Michaud said gravely, "and if you give me leave I will find it out. A purse with a thousand francs in it will loosen that old rogue Fourchon's tongue, though after this morning's performance I suspect that old Fourchon trims his sails to suit every wind. They mean to force you to sell the Aigues, so that old scoundrel of a ropemaker told me. You may be sure of this: there is not a peasant, a small tradesman, farmer or publican, between Conches and Ville-aux-Fayes, but has his money ready against the day of spoil. Fourchon let me know that his son-in-law, Tonsard, has fixed his choice already. The notion that you will sell the Aigues prevails in the valley; it is like a pestilence in the air. Very probably the steward's lodge and a few acres of land round about it will be the price of Sibilet's services as spy. Not a thing do we say among ourselves here, but it is known in Ville-aux-Fayes. Sibilet is related to your enemy Gaubertin. The remark that you let fall just now about the attorney-general will, as likely as not, reach him before you can be at the prefecture. You do not know the people hereabout!"

"Know them?—I know that they are the scum of the earth. To think of giving way before such blackguards! Oh! I would a hundred times sooner set fire to the Aigues myself," cried the General.

"Let us not set fire to it; let us plan out a line of conduct which will baffle their Liliputian stratagems. To hear them talk, they have made up their minds to go all lengths against you; and, by the by, General, speaking of fire, you ought to insure all your houses and farm buildings."

"Oh! Michaud, do you know what they mean by 'the

Upholsterer'? Yesterday as I came along by the Thune the little chaps called out 'There is the Upholsterer!' and ran away.

"Sibilet would be the one to tell you that," said Michaud downheartedly; "he likes to see you in a passion. But since you ask me—well, it is a nickname those blackguards have given you, General."

"Why?"

"Why, on your—your father's account, General."

"Ah! the curs!" shouted the General, turning white with rage. "Yes, Michaud, my father was a furniture dealer, a cabinet maker. The Countess knows nothing about it. Oh! that ever!—Eh, though, after all, I have set queens and empresses dancing. I will tell her everything this evening," he exclaimed after a pause.

"They say that you are a coward," Michaud went on.

"Ha!"

"They want to know how it was that you got off safely at Essling when you left nearly all your regiment there—"

This accusation drew a smile from the General.

"Michaud, I am going to the prefecture," he said, still under some kind of strong excitement, "if it is only to take out insurance policies. Tell the Countess that I have gone. They want war, do they? They shall have it. I will amuse myself by upsetting their schemes for them—these Soulanges tradesmen and their peasants. We are in the enemy's country; we must mind what we are about. Impress it upon the foresters that they must keep well within the law. Poor Vatel, look after him. The Countess has been frightened; she must know nothing of all this; if she did she would never come here again!"

Yet neither the General nor Michaud himself knew the real nature of their peril. Michaud had too lately come to this Burgundian valley; he had no idea of the enemy's strength, although he saw the influences at work; and as for the General, he put too much faith in the power of legislation.

The laws, as fabricated by the modern legislator, have not

all the virtue with which they are credited. They are not even carried out equally all over the country; they are modified in application until the practice flatly contradicts the spirit in which they were framed; and this is a patent fact in every epoch. What historian would be so benighted as to lay down the statement that the decrees of the strongest governments have been equally enforced all over France at once? or that, in the time of the Convention, the requisitions of men, stores and money pressed as heavily upon Provence, or Lower Normandy, or the borders of Brittany, as upon the population of the great centres of civil life? Where is the philosopher who will deny that two men in two neighboring departments may commit the same crime, and one will lose his head, and the other, and perhaps the worst villain of the two, keep his upon his shoulders. We must have equality in life, forsooth, and we have inequality in the administration of the law, and in the penalty of death.

As soon as the population of a city reaches a certain limit, the administrative methods are no longer the same. There are about a hundred cities in France in which the intelligence of the citizens is capable of looking beyond the expediency of the present method, and discerning the wider problems which the law attempts to solve; there the law is intelligently enforced, but in the rest of France, where people understand nothing but their own immediate interests, anything which may interfere with these is a dead letter. Over one half of France, roughly speaking, the *vis inertiæ* neutralizes the action of legislation of every description. Let it be clearly understood, however, that this passive resistance does not extend to certain essentials of political existence, such as the payment of imperial taxes, the conscription, the punishment of heinous crime; but every attempt in legislation to deal with other than broadly recognized necessities, to touch ways of life, private interests or certain forms of abuse, is frustrated by a common consent of reluctance. Even now, while this work is passing through the press, it is easy to discern the signs of this resistance, the

same with which Louis XIV. came into collision in Brittany. Seeing the deplorable state of things caused by the game laws, there are those who will make an annual sacrifice of some twenty or thirty human lives to preserve a few animals.

For a French population of twenty millions the law is nothing but a sheet of white paper nailed to the church door or pinned up in the mayor's office. Hence Mouche's words "the papers," an expression for authority. Many a mayor of a canton (putting simple mayors of communes out of the question) makes paper bags for seeds or raisins out of sheets of the "Bulletin des Lois." And as to the mayors of communes, one would be afraid to say how many there are of them that can neither read nor write, or to ask how the registers are kept up in their districts. Every serious administration is no doubt perfectly aware of the gravity of the situation; doubtless, too, it will diminish; but there is something else which Centralization—so much declaimed against in France, where we declaim against any great thing which has any use or strength in it—which Centralization will never reach, and this power against which it is shattered is the same power with which General Montcornet was about to come into collision—for want of a better name it may be called *Mediocracy*.

Great was the outcry against the tyranny of the nobles; and to-day we shriek against the capitalist and abuses of power which perhaps after all are only the inevitable chafings of that social yoke, styled the "Contract" by Rousseau; we hear of constitutions here and charters there, of king and czar and the English Parliament; but the levelling process which began in 1789 and made a fresh start in 1830 has in reality paved the way for the muddle-headed domination of the bourgeoisie and delivered France over to them. The presentment of a fact seen unhappily but too often in these days, to wit, the enslavement of a canton, a little town, or a sub-prefecture by a single family, the history of the manner in which a Gaubertin contrived to gain this local ascendency

when the Restoration was in full swing, will give a better idea of the crying evil than any quantity of flat assertions. Many an oppressed district will recognize the truth of the picture, and many an obscure down-trodden victim will find in this brief *hic jacet* a publicity given to his private griefs which sometimes soothes them.

When the General concluded a purely imaginary truce for renewed hostilities, his ex-steward had pretty much completed the network of threads in which he held Ville-aux-Fayes and the whole district round it. It will be better to give, in as few words as possible, an account of the various ramifications of the Gaubertin family, for by means of his kin he had involved the whole country in his toils, something as the boa-constrictor winds itself about a tree-trunk so cunningly that the passing traveller mistakes the serpent for some Asiatic vegetable product.

In the year 1793 there were three brothers of the name of Mouchon in the Avonne valley. (It was about that time that the name of the valley was changed; hitherto it had been the valley of the Aigues; now the hated name of the old manor fell out of use and it became the Avonne valley.)

The oldest of the brothers, a steward of the manor of Ronquerolles, became a deputy of the department under the Convention. He took a hint from his friend Gaubertin senior (the public accuser who saved the Soulanges family), and in like manner saved the lives and property of the Ronquerolles. This brother had two daughters; one of them married Gendrin the barrister, the other became the wife of François Gaubertin. Finally, he died in 1804.

The second brother obtained the post-house at Conches *gratis*, thanks to the elder's influence. His daughter, his sole offspring and heiress, married a well-to-do farmer in the neighborhood, Guerbet by name. He died in 1817.

But the youngest of the Mouchons took holy orders. He was cure of Ville-aux-Fayes before the Revolution, cure again after the restoration of the Catholic religion, and now

the year 1823 still found him cure of the little metropolis. He had formerly declined the oath, and in consequence for a long time had kept out of sight and lived in the "hermitage" at the Aigues, protected by the Gaubertins, father and son; and now, at the age of sixty-seven, he enjoyed the affection and esteem of his whole parish, for all his characteristics were common to his flock. He was parsimonious to the verge of avarice, was reported to be very rich, and these rumors of wealth strengthened the respect which he met with on all sides. His lordship the bishop thought very highly of the Abbe Mouchon, usually spoken of as "the venerable cure of Ville-aux-Fayes"; it was well known there that the bishop had pressed him more than once to accept a superb living at the prefecture, and his repeated refusals, no less than his reputation for riches, had endeared the cure Mouchon to fellow-inhabitants.

At this time Gaubertin, mayor of Ville-aux-Fayes, found a solid supporter in his brother-in-law, M. Gendrin, president of the Court of First Instance, while his own son—now the busiest solicitor in the place, and a by-word in the arrondissement—talked already of selling his practice after five years. He meant to be a barrister, and to succeed to his uncle Gendrin when the latter retired. President Gendrin's only son was registrar of mortgages.

Soudry junior, who had fulfilled the functions of public prosecutor for two years, was one of Gaubertin's zealous adherents. Clever Mme. Soudry had done her part. She had strengthened her husband's son's present position by immense expectations when she married him to Rigou's only daughter. One day the public prosecutor would inherit a double fortune, the ex-monk's money would come to him as well as Soudry's savings, and the young fellow would be one of the wealthiest and most important men in the department.

The sub-prefect of Ville-aux-Fayes was a M. des Lupeaulx, a nephew of the secretary of a State department. He was meant to marry Mlle. Elise Gaubertin, the mayor's

youngest daughter. Like her eldest sister, she had a portion of two hundred thousand francs, *besides expectations*. Young des Lupeaulx had unwittingly done a clever thing on first coming to the place in 1819, when he fell straightway in love with Elise; but for his eligibility as a suitor, he would long since have been compelled to ask for an exchange, but as it was, he belonged prospectively to the Gaubertin clan, whose chieftain's eyes were fixed less upon the nephew than upon the uncle in Paris. For all the uncle's influence, in his nephew's interest, was at Gaubertin's disposition.

And so the church, the magistracy, permanent and removable, the municipality and the administration, the four feet of power, walked at the mayor's will.

This power was strengthened in regions above and below its immediate sphere of action by the following means:

The department in which Ville-aux-Fayes is situated is sufficiently populous to nominate six deputies. Ever since the creation of the Left-Centre in the Chamber, Ville-aux-Fayes had been represented by Leclercq, who, it may be remembered, was Gaubertin's son-in-law and the agent in charge of the city wine-cellars, and since had become a governor of the Bank of France. The number of electors which this well-to-do valley furnished to the grand electoral college was sufficiently considerable to insure the election of M. de Ronquerolles (the patron acquired, as explained by the Mouchon family), even if an arrangement had to be made. The electors of Ville-aux-Fayes gave their support to the prefect on condition that the Marquis de Ronquerolles should continue to be elected by the grand college. So Gaubertin, the first to hit upon this electioneering expedient, was in good order at the prefecture, which he saved many disappointments. The prefect managed to return three out-and-out Ministerialists, as well as two deputies for the Left-Centre, and as one of these two last was a governor of the Bank of France, and the other the Marquis de Ronquerolles, the Comte du Sérizy's brother-in-law, there was little to alarm the Cabinet. So the Ministry of the Interior looked upon

the elections in this particular department as very well regulated.

The Comte de Soulanges, a peer of France, a Marshal-designate, and a faithful adherent of the House of Bourbon, knew that his estates and woods were well managed and properly guarded by Soudry and Lupin the notary. He might be considered to be Gendrin's patron, for he had successively procured for him the posts of judge and president, with the co-operation of M. de Ronquerolles.

MM. Leclercq and de Ronquerolles took their seats in the Centre-Left, and toward the Left rather than to the Centre side, a position in politics which presents numerous advantages to those who can change their political conscience like a suit of clothes.

M. Leclercq's brother had obtained the post of tax-collector at Ville-aux-Fayes, and Leclercq himself, the banker deputy of the arrondissement, had recently purchased a fine estate, bringing in thirty thousand francs a year, together with a park and a château, the whole lying just outside the town—a position which enabled him to influence the whole canton.

In these ways Gaubertin had power in the higher regions of the State, in the two Chambers, and in the Cabinet; he could count upon influence both potent and active, and as yet he had not weakened it by asking for trifles, nor strained it by too many serious demands.

Councillor Gendrin, appointed vice-president by the Chamber, was the real power in the Court-Royal. The First President, one of the three Ministerialist deputies returned by the department, and an indispensable orator of the Centre, was away for half the year, and left his court to vice-president Gendrin.

The prefect himself was another deputy, and the prefect's right hand was a member of his council, a cousin of Sarcus the justice, called Money-Sarcus by way of distinction. But for the family considerations which bound Gaubertin and young des Lupeaulx, Mme. Sarcus's brother would have

been "put forward" as sub-prefect of the arrondissement of Ville-aux-Fayes. Mme. Sarcus (wife of Money-Sarcus) was a Vallat of Soulanges, and related to the Gaubertins. It was said of her that she had shown a preference for the notary Lupin when he was a young man; and now, though she was a woman of five-and-forty, with a grown-up son, an assistant-surveyor, Lupin never went to the prefecture but he paid his respects to Mme. Money-Sarcus, or dined with her.

The nephew of Guerbet, the postmaster, was, as we have seen, the son of the Soulanges tax-collector, and filled the important post of examining magistrate at the tribunal of Ville-aux-Fayes. The third magistrate was a Corbinet, son of the notary of that name, and, of course, belonged body and soul to the all-powerful mayor of Ville-aux-Fayes, and (to close the list of legal functionaries) the deputy magistrate was Vigor, junior, son of the lieutenant of gendarmerie.

Now Sibilet's father, who had been clerk of the court ever since there had been a court at all, had married his sister to M. Vigor, the aforesaid lieutenant of gendarmerie at Ville-aux-Fayes. Sibilet himself, good man, was a father of six, and a cousin of Gaubertin's father through his wife, a Gaubertin-Vallat.

Only eighteen months ago the united efforts of both deputies, of M. de Soulanges and President Gendrin, had successfully created a post of commissary of police and filled it. The elder Sibilet's second son had the appointment. Sibilet's eldest daughter had married M. Hervé, a schoolmaster; within a year of the marriage his establishment was transformed, and Ville-aux-Fayes received the boon of a head-master of a grammar school.

Another Sibilet, Maître Corbinet's clerk, looked to the Gaubertins, Leclercqs, and Soudrys to be his sureties when the time should come for buying his employer's practice; and the youngest found employment in the Inland Revenue Department for the time being, with a prospect of succeeding to the position of Registrar when the present occupant

should reach the limit of service prescribed for obtaining a pension.

Sibilet's youngest daughter, a girl of sixteen, was engaged to be married to Captain Corbinet, Maître Corbinet's brother, master of the post-office, and this completes the history of the Sibilet family.

The postmaster at Ville-aux-Fayes was Vigor, senior, brother-in-law of Leclercq of the city cellars. He commanded the National Guard. Mme. Sibilet's sister, an elderly spinster and a Gaubertin-Vallat, held the office of stamp distributor.

Look where you liked in Ville-aux-Fayes, you found some member of the invisible coalition, headed avowedly (for the fact was openly recognized by great and small) by the mayor, the general agent of the timber trade—Monsieur Gaubertin!

If you left the seat of the sub-prefecture and went further down the Avonne valley, you found Gaubertin again ruling Soulanges through the Soudrys, and Lupin, the deputy-mayor, the steward of the manor of Soulanges, in constant communication with the Count; through Sarcus, justice of the peace, and his son's wife's father; through Guerbet, the tax-collector, and Gourdon, the doctor, who had married a Gendrin-Vattebled. Gaubertin governed Blangy through Rigou, and Conches through the postmaster, whose word was law in his own commune. And by the way in which the ambitious mayor of Ville-aux-Fayes spread his influence far and wide in the Avonne valley, it may be imagined how far he made himself felt in the rest of the arrondissement.

The head of the firm of Leclercq was put forward as principal deputy. It had been agreed upon from the very first that he would relinquish his place to Gaubertin so soon as he himself should obtain the post of receiver-general of the department. Young Soudry, the public prosecutor, was to become attorney-general to the Court-Royal; while the rich examining-magistrate Guerbet was to be one of the councillors. This general promotion, far from being oppressive, was to insure the advancement of others, such, for instance,

as Vigor, the deputy-magistrate, or François Vallat, Money-Sarcus's wife's cousin, at present only prosecutor-substitute. In fact, all the ambitious young men in the valley, and every family which had anything to gain, were so many supporters of the coalition.

Gaubertin's influence was so serious and so powerful in the district that its secret springs of wealth, the savings hoarded up by the Rigous, Soudrys, Gendrins, Guerbets, and Lupins, nay, by Money-Sarcus himself, were all controlled by him. Ville-aux-Fayes, moreover, believed in its mayor. Gaubertin's ability was not more cried up than his honesty and his readiness to oblige. He was at the service of all his relations; there was not one of his constituents but could claim his help; but it was a game of give and take. His town council looked up to him. Wherefore the whole department blamed M. Mariotte of Auxerre for crossing good M. Gaubertin's path.

The Ville-aux-Fayes townspeople took their abilities for granted, since nothing had ever occurred to put them to the test; they prided themselves simply and solely on having no outsiders among them, and thought themselves excellent patriots. Thus nothing escaped this tyranny, so carefully thought out that it was scarcely recognized as tyranny, for the spectacle of natives filling every high place struck the ordinary mind as a triumph of native intellect. For instance, when the Liberal Opposition declared war against the Bourbons of the elder branch, Gaubertin saw an opening for a natural son of his, for whom he was at a loss to provide. His wife did not know of the existence of this Bournier, as he was called, who for a long time had been kept in Paris. Leclercq had looked after him till he became a foreman in a printing office, but now Gaubertin set him up as a printer in the town of Ville-aux-Fayes. Acting on the prompting of his protector, the young fellow brought out a newspaper three times a week, and the "Courrier de l'Avonne" began by taking away the official announcements from the paper of the prefecture. This local sheet, while supporting the

Ministry, inclined to the Centre-Left, and obtained a large circulation by publishing a summary of the market reports of Burgundy; but in reality it was worked in the interests of the Rigou-Gaubertin-Soudry triumvirate. Young Bournier, the head of a fairly large establishment which already began to pay very well, paid court to one of attorney Maréchal's daughters, and appeared to be well received.

There was one outsider in the great Avonnaise family in the person of the district surveyor; but the greatest efforts were being made to exchange the stranger for a native Sarcus, Money-Sarcus's son, and in all likelihood this broken thread in the mesh would very shortly be repaired.

The formidable league which filled every public and private position with its own members, draining the wealth of the neighborhood, and clinging to power as the remora clings to the ship's keel, was not visible at first sight. General Montcornet had no suspicion of it, and the prefecture congratulated itself upon the flourishing condition of Ville-aux-Fayes. At the Home Office it was said: "There is a model sub-prefecture for you, everything there goes on wheels! If all arrondissements were like that one, how happy we should be!" And family cliques came so effectually to the aid of local feeling that here, as in many another little town, nay, prefecture, any outsider appointed to an official position would have been forced to leave the district within the year.

The victim of all-powerful bourgeois clannishness is so thoroughly entangled and gagged that he does not dare to complain; like the intruding snail in a beehive, he is sealed up, be-waxed and be-glued. There are great inducements to this course of invisible, intangible tyranny; there is the strong desire to be among one's own people, to see after one's own bits of property; there is the mutual help which relatives can afford, and the guarantees given to the administration by the fact that its agent is working under the eyes of his fellow-citizens and amenable to local public opinion. Moreover, nepotism is not confined to little country towns; it is quite as common in higher branches of the civil service.

But what is the actual outcome? Local interests triumph over wider and larger considerations; the intentions of the central government in Paris are completely defeated, the real facts of the case are twisted out of all knowledge, the province laughs in the face of the central authority. Great national necessities once supplied, in fact, the remaining laws, generally speaking, instead of modifying the character of the people, are modified by them, and the masses, instead of adapting themselves to the law, adapt the law to themselves.

Any one who has travelled in the south or west of France, or in Alsace (unless indeed he travels simply for the sake of seeing landscapes and public monuments and sleeping in the inns), must admit that these observations are just. As yet the effects of bourgeois nepotism only appear as isolated symptoms, but the tendencies of recent legislation will aggravate the disease, and this domination of dulness may cause fearful evils, as will be abundantly evident in the course of this drama in the Aigues valley.

Under old systems, overturned more rashly than is generally thought, under the Monarchy and the Empire, this kind of abuse was kept in check by an upper hierarchy; a counterpoise was found in class distinctions which were senselessly denominated "privilege." But as soon as a general scramble up the soaped pole of authority begins, "privilege" ceases to exist. Would it not be wise, moreover, to recognize at once that since there must be a "privileged class," it had better consist of those who are openly and avowedly privileged? that those who have taken their position by stratagem and intrenched themselves in it by cunning, private self-seeking, and fraudulent imitations of public spirit, are only doing the work of despotism over again on a fresh foundation and a notch lower in the social scale? Shall we not have overthrown a race of noble tyrants who had the interests of their country at heart, only to create a race of self-seeking tyrants in their stead? Shall authority issue from cellars instead of spreading its influence from its natural place? These things should be borne in mind. The

Parochialism just portrayed will gain ground in the Chamber of Deputies.

Montcornet's friend, the Comte de la Roche-Hugon, had been dismissed a short time before the General's last visit. This dismissal drove the statesman into the Liberal Opposition; he became one of the leading lights of the Left, and then promptly deserted his party for an embassy. To him succeeded, luckily for Montcornet, a son-in-law of the Marquis de Troisville, the Comte de Castéran, Mme. de Montcornet's uncle, who received him as a relation, and graciously begged him to renew his acquaintance with the prefecture. The Comte de Casteran listened to Montcornet's complaints, and asked the bishop, the colonel of gendarmerie, the attorney-general, Councillor Sarcus, and the commandant of the division, to meet him at breakfast on the following day.

Baron Bourlac, the attorney-general, first brought into prominence by the trials of La Chanterie and Rifaël, was a man of a kind invaluable to a government, by reason of his stanch support of any party in power. He owed his elevation to a fanatical worship of the Emperor, and his continuance in his judicial rank partly to an inflexible nature, partly to the professional conscience which he brought to the performance of his duties. As a public prosecutor he had once ruthlessly hunted out the remnants of Chouannerie, now he prosecuted Bonapartists with equal zeal. But time and storms had softened him down, and, as most frequently happens, the hero of terrific legends had grown charming in his ways and manner.

The Comte de Montcornet set forth his position, and mentioned his head-forester's fears. Then he began to talk about the necessity of making examples and of maintaining the cause of property.

His audience of high officials heard him out with solemn faces, giving him vague generalities by way of answer.—"Oh, of course, of course, force should be on the side of the law. —Your cause is the cause of every landowner.—We will give the matter our attention, but in our position we are obliged

to be very careful.—A monarchy is bound to do more for the people than the people would do for themselves if they were sovereign rulers as in 1793.—The people have heavy burdens; our duty to them is as clear as our duty to you."

Then the inexorable attorney-general suavely set forth various thoughtful and benevolent views touching the lower orders, which would have convinced future constructors of Utopias that the higher ranks of the officialdom of that day were not unacquainted with the knotty points of the problem to be solved by modern society.

It may not be out of place to say here that, at this very time, during the Epoch of the Restoration, sanguinary collisions were very common all over the kingdom, and upon this very point in question. Wood-stealing and other peasants' encroachments were regarded as vested interests. The Court and the Ministry strongly objected to all disturbances of this kind and to the bloodshed consequent upon forcible repression, successful and unsuccessful. It was felt that severity was needed, but the local authorities were made to feel that they had blundered if the peasants were put down harshly, and if, on the other hand, they showed any weakness they were cashiered. So prefects were apt to equivocate when these deplorable accidents happened.

At the very outset Money-Sarcus had made a sign (unseen by Montcornet) which the prefect and public prosecutor both understood, a sign which changed the tone of the conversation that followed. The attorney-general knew pretty much how things were in the Aigues valley through his assistant, young Soudry.

"I can see that there will be a terrible struggle," the public prosecutor had told his chief (he had come over from Ville-aux-Fayes on purpose to see him). "We shall have gendarmes killed—I know that from my spies; and the trial will be an ugly business. No jury will be got to convict with a prospect of the hatred of twenty or thirty families before them; they will not give us the heads of the murderers, nor the amount of penal servitude which we shall require

for the accomplices. The utmost we should obtain, if you conducted the prosecution in person, would be a few years' imprisonment for the worst offenders. It is better to shut our eyes, for if we keep them open the end of it all will be a collision which will cost lives, and perhaps six thousand francs to the Government, to say nothing of the expense of keeping the men in the hulks. That is paying dear for a victory which will make the weakness of justice apparent to all eyes."

Montcornet was incapable of suspecting the influence of "mediocracy" in the valley, so he never so much as mentioned Gaubertin, who stirred up and rekindled the smouldering flames.

When breakfast was over, the Baron took Montcornet's arm and carried him off to the prefect's study. When they issued from this conference Montcornet wrote to his wife that he was setting out for Paris, and should not return for a week. The wisdom of the measures advised by Baron Bourlac will be seen later on, when they were carried into execution. If a way yet remained to the Aigues of escaping the "ill-will," it was only through the policy which Bourlac privately recommended to Montcornet.

These explanations will seem tedious to those who care for nothing but the interest of the story, but it is worth while to observe here that the historian of manners is bound by rules even more stringent than those which control the historian of fact. The historian of manners is bound to make everything appear probable—even truth itself, while, in the domain of history proper, the impossible requires no apology; these facts actually happened, and the writer simply records them. The ups and downs of family and social life are created by a host of small causes, and every one of these has a bearing on the event.

The man of science must clear away the masses of an avalanche which swept away whole villages, to show you the fallen fragments of stone on the mountain-side where

the mass of snow first began to gather. If this were merely the story of a man's suicide—there are five hundred suicides in Paris every year—it is a hackneyed melodrama, and every one is content with the briefest account of the victim's motives; but that Property should commit suicide!—who will believe it, in these days when wealth appears to be dearer than life itself? *De re vestra agitur*, wrote the fabulist—this story touches the interests of all owners of property. Let it be borne in mind that if a canton and a little country town are in league, in the present instance, against an old General who, despite his reckless courage, had escaped the hazards of countless previous battles, the same kind of conspiracy is set on foot, in more than one department, against men who are striving for the general good. Every man of genius, every great statesman, every great agricultural reformer, every innovator in short, is continually threatened by this kind of coalition.

This last indication of what may be called the political bearing of the story not only brings out every actor in his true aspect, and gives significance to the most trifling details of the drama: it turns a searching light upon a Scene where all social interests form the stage-mechanism.

X

A HAPPY WOMAN'S PRESENTIMENTS

AS THE GENERAL stepped into his carriage and drove away to the prefecture, the Countess reached the Avonne gate, where Michaud and Olympe had taken up their abode some eighteen months ago.

Any one who remembered the hunting-lodge in its previous condition, described above, might have thought that the place had been rebuilt. The bricks that had dropped out or suffered from the weather had been replaced and the walls had been pointed; the white balusters stood out against a bluish background of clean slates, and the whole house looked cheerful once more. The labyrinth of pigsties had been cleared away, new gravel had been laid down, and the paths were rolled by the man who had charge of the alleys in the park. The window-facings, entablatures, and cornices, indeed all the carved stonework, had been restored, and the monument of the past shone in all its ancient glory.

The poultry-yard, stable, and cow-sheds had been removed to the precincts by the pheasant-house hidden away behind the wall; all the unsightly details had disappeared, but the sounds, the low cooing, and the flapping of wings mingled with the ceaseless murmur of the forest trees—a most delicate accompaniment to the endless song of Nature. There was something of the wildness of lonely forests about the spot, something too of the trim grace of an English park. And the hunting-lodge looked indescribably stately, fair, and pleasant a dwelling, now that its surroundings were in keeping with the exterior, just as a happy young housewife's care had entirely transformed the lodge within since the days of Courtecuisse's brutish slovenliness.

It was in the height of summer. The scent of flowers in the garden beds blended with the wild scent of the woods and of mown grass from the meadows in the park.

The Countess and her two guests, coming along a winding footpath that led to the hunting-lodge, saw Olympe Michaud sitting in the doorway at work upon baby clothes. The woman's figure, and her work as she sat there sewing, gave the touch of human interest, the final touch which the landscape lacked; a kind of interest which appeals to us in real life so strongly that there are painters who have tried, and tried mistakenly, to introduce it into landscape pictures, forgetting that if they really render the spirit of the landscape upon their canvas its grandeur reduces the human figure into insignificance. The scene, as we actually see it, is always circumscribed; the spectator's power of vision can only include sufficient of the background to place the figure in its proper setting. Poussin, the Raphael of France, when he painted his "Arcadian Shepherds" subordinated the landscape to the figures; his insight told him how pitiable and poor man becomes in a canvas where Nature takes the chief place.

Here was August in all its glory among fields ready for the harvest, a picture to arouse simple and strong emotion. It was like a realization of the dream of many a man who has come to long for rest after a storm-tossed existence and a life of change made up of good and evil fortune.

Let us give the history of this household in a few words. When Montcornet had first talked of the head-forester's place at the Aigues, Justin Michaud had not responded very warmly to the gallant cavalry officer's advances. He was thinking at the time of going into the army again, but in the thick of the conference which brought him frequently to the Hotel Montcornet, Michaud set eyes on Madame's own woman, and his ideas underwent a change.

The girl came of honest farmers in Alençon, and was something of an heiress, for she had expectations—twenty or thirty thousand francs would be hers sooner or later; but

her father and mother, finding themselves in difficulties (a not uncommon case with tillers of the soil who have married young, and whose parents are still living), and consequently unable to give their daughter any education, had intrusted her to the young Countess, who placed her about her person. Mlle. Olympe Charel was not allowed to take her meals at the servants' table. The Countess had her instructed in dressmaking and plain needlework, and was rewarded by the whole-hearted fidelity of which a Parisian stands in need.

Olympe Charel was a pretty, rather plump Normande, with a shade of gold in her fair hair, and bright eyes that lighted up her face, but a delicate, haughtily curved nose was perhaps one of her most striking characteristics, and a certain maidenliness, in spite of the Spanish curves of her figure. She had all the air of distinction which a young girl, of extraction somewhat above the laboring class, can acquire from contact with a mistress who admits her to a certain degree of intimacy. She was well-mannered and becomingly dressed, expressed herself well, and carried herself with ease. Michaud soon fell in love, and the more readily when he learned that his fair one would have a pretty fortune some day.

It was the Countess who made difficulties. She was unwilling to lose a maid so useful to her; but when Montcornet unfolded his plans for the Aigues, nothing was wanting but the parents' consent for the marriage to take place, and that consent was promptly given.

Michaud, like his master, regarded his wife as a superior being, to be obeyed without reservation. He saw before him all the happiness for which a soldier longs when he leaves the army—a quiet life, plenty of outdoor occupation, and just sufficient bodily weariness to make rest delightful. Michaud's courage was established beyond cavil, yet he had never received any serious wound, and had had no experience of the physical suffering which sours many a veteran's temper. Like all really strong natures, he was equable, and his wife gave him unbounded love. Their life at the lodge

had been one long honeymoon, with no discordant note in their surroundings to break in upon their happiness. Rare fortune! Not always do the circumstances of our outward life harmonize with the life of the inner self.

The scene was so picturesque that the Countess stopped Blondet and the Abbe Brossette. As they stood, they could see the charming Mme. Michaud without being seen by her.

"I always come this way when I walk in the park," the Countess said in a whisper; "I like to look at the hunting-lodge and its pair of turtle-doves; it is like some favorite beautiful view for me." She leaned on Émile Blondet's arm, that he might feel the meaning underlying her words, that where speech fell short touch might convey a subtle significance which women will divine.

"I wish I were a gatekeeper at the Aigues!" exclaimed Blondet, with a smile. . . . "Why, what is it?" he added, as a shade of sadness crossed the lady's face at those words.

"Nothing."

Whenever womankind have something weighing on their minds, they will tell you hypocritically that it is nothing.

"But possibly the thought that preys upon us would seem very trifling to you, though to us it is terrible. I, for my own part, envy Olympe her lot—"

"Wishes are heard in heaven!" said the Abbe Brossette, with a smile that relieved the solemnity of his words.

Something in Olympe's attitude and expression told Mme. de Montcornet of anxiety and fears, and she too grew anxious. A woman can read another woman's thoughts from the way she draws her needle in and out, and, indeed, the head-forester's wife, in her pretty pink dress, her hair coiled daintily about her head, seemed to be turning over sad thoughts in her mind, thoughts but little in keeping with her dress, her work, and the sunny day. Now and again she looked up and fixed unseeing eyes on the gravel paths or the green thickets, and the anxious expression on her fair forehead was the more artlessly displayed because she thought herself unobserved.

"And I was envying her! What can darken her thoughts?" the Countess said, looking at the cure.

"Can you explain, Madame," said the Abbe, speaking softly, "how it is that our most perfect bliss is always troubled by dim forebodings?"

"Cure," said Blondet, smiling, "you permit yourself Delphic answers.—'Nothing is stolen, everything is paid for,' so Napoleon said."

"Such a saying in the Emperor's mouth becomes a generalization wide as humanity," said the Abbe.

"Well, Olympe, what is the matter, child?" asked the Countess, stepping in front of the others toward her ex-waiting-maid. "You look dreamy and thoughtful. Is it possible that there has been a tiff at home?"

Mme. Michaud rose to her feet. Her face wore a different expression already.

"I should dearly like to know what has brought the shadow over that brow, my child," said Émile Blondet paternally, "when we are almost as nicely housed here as the Comte d'Artois at the Tuileries. This is like a nightingale's nest in a thicket. And have we not the bravest man of the Young Guard for a husband, a fine fellow, who loves us to distraction? If I had known the advantages Montcornet offers you here, I would have left off writing padding for newspapers, and turned head-keeper myself!"

"Oh, this is not the place for any one with your genius, sir!" said Olympe, smiling back at him, as if he and she were old acquaintances.

"Why, my dear little woman, what is the matter?" asked the Countess.

"Well, then, my lady, I am afraid—"

"*Afraid!* of what?" the Countess asked quickly. The words put her in mind at once of Mouche and Fourchon.

"Afraid of the wolves?" suggested Émile, making a warning sign which Olympe failed to understand.

"No, sir, it is the peasants. In Perche, where I was born, there certainly were a few bad characters. But I

could not believe that there would be such bad people, and so many of them in a place, as there are here. I do not pretend to meddle in Michaud's business, but he trusts the peasants so little that he goes armed in broad daylight if he is going through the forest. He tells his men to be always on the lookout. Now and again there are figures prowling about here; they mean no good. The other day I was going along by the wall to the spring at the head of the little stream with the sandy bed, which flows through the wood and out into the park through the grating five hundred paces away. They call it the Silver Spring, because Bouret (so they say) strewed silver spangles in it. Do you know it, my lady? Very well, then, there were two women there washing clothes, just where the stream crosses the footpath to Conches. I heard them talking; they did not know that I was near. You can see our house from the spot. The two old creatures were looking at it and one said to the other, 'What a lot of expense they are going to for him that has taken old Courtecuisse's place!' Then the other one said, 'Wouldn't you have to pay a man well for plaguing poor folk, as he does?'—'He will not plague them long,' answered the first one; 'this sort of thing must be put a stop to. After all, we have a *right* to cut wood. Madame des Aigues, that's gone, allowed us to take fagots. We have done it these thirty years; so it is an established right.'—'We shall see how things go this winter,' the second one went on. 'My man has sworn, I know, by all that's sacred, that we shall get our firewood, and that all the gendarmerie on earth shall not hinder us, and that he will do it himself, and so much the worse for them.'—'Lord sakes! we must not die of cold, and we must certainly bake our bread'; said the first woman. 'They don't want for nothing, they don't! That blackguard Michaud's little wife will be well taken care of!'—In fact, my lady, they said shocking things about me, and you, and M. le Comte. Then at last they said that first the farm buildings would be fired, and then the château—"

"Pooh!" said Émile, "old wives' gossip. They used to rob the General; now they will not rob him any longer, and they are furious: that is all. Just bear in mind that the Government is always the strongest everywhere, even in Burgundy; and they would soon have a regiment of horse down here if there was any occasion for it."

The cure behind the Countess was making signals to Olympe to cut short the tale of fears, due surely to the second sight of strong love. When a soul finds its all in all in another soul, it scans the whole horizon about that central figure to discern the elements of the future. Love brings a woman the presentiments which at a later day become the second-sight of motherhood. Hence the melancholy and unaccountable moods of sadness which bewilder men. The great cares and constant stir of life prevent this concentration in a man, but for a woman all strong love becomes an active contemplation more or less lucid, more or less profound, according to individual character.

"Come, child, show M. Émile over your house," said the Countess. These new thoughts had put La Péchina out of her mind, and she had quite forgotten the purpose of her visit.

The inside of the house had been restored and brought into harmony with the imposing exterior. An architect and workmen had come from Paris (a slight warmly resented by Ville-aux-Fayes), and the original partition-walls were restored, so that now there were, as at first, four rooms on the ground floor. An old-fashioned balustraded wooden staircase rose at the further end of the lobby, behind it lay the kitchen, and on either side of it the two oak-panelled parlors with coats of arms painted on the ceilings. The furniture had been chosen to match these old-fashioned decorations by the artist who had restored the rooms at the Aigues.

In those days it was not the fashion to set an exaggerated value on the wreckage of bygone centuries. The lumber rooms of furniture-shops at Ville-aux-Fayes were full

of old high-backed tapestry-covered chairs in carved walnut wood, console tables, old timepieces, tables, sconces, and woven hangings, solid furniture worth half as much again as the flimsy stuff turned out by the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. Two or three cartloads of this old lumber, carefully chosen by the aforesaid architect, and some disused furniture from the château, had transformed the parlor at the Avonne gate into something like an artist's creation. The dining-room had been painted the color of the natural wood, a paper of the kind known as Highland plaid covered the walls. Mme. Michaud had hung white green-fringed dimity curtains in the windows, the mahogany chairs were covered with green stuff, and two huge mahogany sideboards and a mahogany dining-table completed the furniture. Prints of soldiers adorned the walls. The keeper's guns were stacked on either side of the porcelain stove. Rumor exaggerated these inexpensive glories until they became the last word of Oriental luxury. Strange it was! These things aroused Gaubertin's covetousness, and when, in his own mind, he pulled the Aigues to pieces, he reserved that palatial lodge for himself.

The three principal bedrooms occupied the first floor. Here you beheld those muslin curtains associated in a Parisian's mind with the peculiar notions and mental attitude of those who conform to bourgeois standards. Here, if Mme. Michaud had been left to herself, she would have had satin wall-papers. Her own room contained a four-post bedstead, with a curving head and coronal from which the embroidered muslin curtains hung. The rest of the furniture was of the ordinary mahogany, Utrecht-velvet-covered kind to be seen everywhere; but the chimney-piece displayed an alabaster clock flanked by two gauze-shrouded candlesticks and vases of artificial flowers beneath glass shades—the quartermaster's marriage-gifts to his bride. The rooms in the roof where La Péchina, the cook, and the man belonging to the establishment were lodged, had also shared in the benefits of the restoration.

"Olympe, child, there is something else," said the Countess (she had gone into Mme. Michaud's room, leaving Emile and the cure, who went downstairs together, when they heard the bedroom door close).

The Abbe Brossette had managed to get a word with Mme. Michaud. So now, to avoid mentioning the fears which were far more serious than her words had led them to suppose, she made a mysterious communication which reminded Mme. de Montcornet of the purpose of her visit.

"I love Michaud, my lady, as you know. Very well then, would you be pleased to have a rival always with you in the house?"

"A rival!"

"Yes, my lady. That little gipsy you gave to me to look after has fallen in love with Michaud. She does not know it herself, poor child! . . . For a long while her behavior was a mystery to me, but the mystery was cleared up a few days ago."

"A girl of thirteen—!"

"Yes, my lady. And you will admit that a woman three months advanced in pregnancy, who means to nurse her child herself, may have fears. I could not tell you that before those gentlemen, so I said things that meant nothing," the generous woman added adroitly.

Olympe Michaud's anxiety on Geneviève Niseron's account was exceedingly small, but she went in mortal terror for her husband, and the peasants who had roused her fears took a malicious delight in keeping them alive.

"And what opened your eyes?"

"Nothing and everything!" Olympe answered, looking full at the Countess. "Poor little thing, she is as slow as a tortoise over anything that I tell her to do, and as quick as a lizard if Justin asks her for the least trifle. She quivers like a leaf at the sound of my husband's voice; her face, when she looks at him, is like the face of a saint rising up to heaven; but she does not know what love is; she does not suspect that she is in love."

"Poor child!" said the Countess, unconscious that her smile and tone revealed her thoughts. Mme. Michaud smiled an answer to her young mistress's smile.

"Geneviève is glum, for instance, when Justin is out of the house; if I ask her what she is thinking about, she says that she is afraid of M. Rigou—all rubbish! She thinks that every one is after her—and she as black as the chimney flue! When Justin is making his round of a night in the woods, the child is every bit as nervous as I am. If I open the window when I hear my husband's horse coming I can see a light in her room, which shows that La Péchina (as they call her) is sitting up, waiting for him to come in. Like me, she does not go to bed till he comes home."

"Thirteen years old!" said the Countess; "unfortunate girl—"

"Unfortunate?" echoed Olympe. "Oh! no. Her child's passion will save her."

"From what?"

"From the fate of almost every girl of her age hereabout. She is not so plain-looking now since I have polished her up, and there is something uncommon about her, something wild, that men find taking.—She has altered so much that you would not know her, my lady. There is Nicolas, the son of that abominable man at the Grand-I-Vert, and one of the worst rogues in the place; he bears the child a grudge and hunts her like game. You could scarcely believe that a rich man like M. Rigou, who changes his servant every three years, could persecute an ugly little girl of twelve, but it really seems as if Nicolas Tonsard was after La Péchina; Justin told me as much. It would be a shocking thing, for the people here live just like beasts, but Justin and the two servants and I watch over the child; so be easy, my lady; she never goes out except in broad daylight, and then she only goes from here to the Conches gate. If by chance she should fall into a trap, her feeling for Justin would give her strength and will to resist, as a woman who cares about another can resist a man she detests."

"I came here on her account," said the lady; "I had no idea how much the visit was needed for your sake, for she will not always be thirteen. The child will grow handsomer."

"Oh! I am quite sure of Justin, my lady," Olympe said, smiling. "What a man! what a heart!—If you only knew how deep his gratitude is to the General, to whom (he says) he owes his happiness! He is only too devoted; he would risk his life as if he were in the army still; he forgets that now he may be a father."

"Well," said the Countess, with a glance that brought the color into Olympe's face, "I was sorry to lose you; but now that I see your happiness I have no regrets left. How sublime and noble married love is!" she added, thinking aloud the thought which she had not dared to utter in the Abbe's presence. Virginie de Troisville stood lost in musings, and Olympe Michaud respected her mistress's mood.

"Let us see," the Countess said, speaking like one who awakes from a dream. "Is this little one honest?"

"As honest as I am myself, my lady."

"Discreet?"

"As a tomb."

"Has she a grateful nature?"

"Oh, my lady, she has fits of humility, signs of an angelic nature, she comes and kisses my hands and says things that would amaze you.—'Is it possible to die of love?' she asked me the day before yesterday.—'What makes you ask me that?' said I.—'I wanted to know if it was a disease.'"

"Did she say that?" exclaimed the Countess.

"If I could remember all that she says, I could tell you much stranger things than that," said Olympe. "It looks as if she knows more about it than I do."

"Do you think, my dear, that she might take your place? for I cannot do without an Olympe," said the Countess, with something like sadness in her smile.

"Not yet, my lady, she is too young; in two years' time

she might. Then, if she must go away, I will let you know. She must be trained first; she knows nothing of the world. Geneviève's grandfather, old Niseron, is one of those men who would have his throat cut sooner than tell a lie; he would die of hunger sooner than touch anything intrusted to him. He holds to his opinions, and his granddaughter has been brought up in the same way of thinking. La Péchina would think herself your equal, for the good man has made a Republican of her, as he puts it; just as old Fourchon has made a vagabond of Mouche. I myself laugh at these flights, but you might be annoyed by them. She would worship you for your kindness, but she would not look up to you as above her in station. How can it be helped! She is as wild as a swallow. The mother, too, counts for something in all this."

"Then who was the mother?"

"Do you not know the story, my lady? Oh, well, old Niseron, the sacristan at Blangy, had a son, a fine strapping young fellow he was, they say, and he was drawn by the great requisition. Young Niseron was still only a gunner in 1809, in a regiment stationed in the heart of Illyria and Dalmatia. Then there came orders to march at once through Hungary to cut off the retreat of the Austrians if the Emperor should win the battle of Wagram. Michaud was in Dalmatia, and he told me all about it. While they were at Zahara, young Niseron, being a very handsome young fellow, won the heart of a Montenegrin girl from the hills, who looked not unkindly on the French garrison. After they left the place the girl found it impossible to stay in it, she had lowered herself so much in her people's eyes; so Zéna Kropoli—'the Frenchwoman,' as they scornfully called her—followed the regiment. After the peace she came to France. Auguste Niseron asked for leave to marry the Montenegrin a little while before Geneviève was born, but the poor thing died at Vincennes shortly after the birth of the child in January, 1810. The papers which you must have, if a marriage is to be valid, came a few days too late, so Auguste

Niseron wrote to ask his father to come for the child, to bring a wet-nurse with him, and to take charge of it; and it was very well he did so, for he was killed soon after by a shell at Montereau. The child was baptized Geneviève at Soulanges. Mlle. Laguerre was much touched by the case and took an interest in the child; it seems as if it were decreed that Geneviève should be adopted by the gentry at the Aigues. Time was when Niseron had all the baby-clothes from the château, and he was helped with money too."

The Countess and Olympe, standing by the window, saw Michaud come up to Blondet and the Abbé Brossette, who were chatting as they walked up and down in the sanded semicircular space which corresponded to the crescent outside the park palings.

"Where can she be?" asked the lady; "you have made me extremely curious to see her."

"She has gone to take the milk to Mlle. Gaillard at the Conches gate. She cannot be far away, for she has been gone for more than an hour."

"Oh, well, I will go to meet her with these gentlemen," said Mme. de Montcornet, and she went downstairs. She was just opening her sunshade when Michaud came up to tell her that her husband would probably be away for two days.

"M. Michaud," the Countess began quickly, "tell me the plain truth. Something serious is afoot. Your wife is nervous; and really, if the place is full of such people as old Fourchon, no one could live in it—"

"If it were like that, we should not be on our legs, my lady," said Michaud laughing, "for it would be very easy to get rid of us keepers. The peasants call out, that is all. But as for proceeding from squalling to acting, from petty theft to crime, they set too much store on their own lives and the open air for that. Olympe must have been repeating some gossip that frightened her—but a dream would frighten her just now," he added, taking his wife's arm and laying it on his own in a way that bade her say no more of her fears.

"Cornevin! Juliette!" called Mme. Michaud. The old servant's face soon appeared at the window. "I am going out for a minute or two. Look after the house."

Two huge dogs began to bark; evidently the lodge by the Avonne gate was not ill garrisoned. The barking of the dogs brought out Cornevin from behind the wall—Cornevin, a Percheron and Olympe's foster-father, with a face such as Perche alone can produce. Cornevin must surely have been a Chouan in '94 and '99.

The whole party went with the Countess along that one of the six gravelled ways which went by the side of the Silver Spring toward the Conches gate. Mme. de Montcornet and Blondet walked ahead of the others. The cure, the head-forester, and Olympe talked with lowered voices over this revelation which had been made to the lady.

"Perhaps it is all for the best," concluded the cure, "for if Mme. de Montcornet chooses we may work a change in these people by kindness and gentleness."

They had come about a couple of hundred yards from the lodge by this time, and had passed the point where the stream flowed in, when the Countess saw the broken shards of a red earthen pitcher on the path; milk had been spilled.

"What has happened to the child?" she asked, calling to Michaud and his wife, who had turned back.

"The same little mishap that befell the milkmaid in the fable," said Blondet.

"No," said the Abbe, looking about him, "some one sprang out upon the poor child and chased her."

"Yes. Those are certainly La Péchina's footprints," said Michaud. The footmarks turned so sharply that evidently the whole thing had happened suddenly. The little girl, in her terror, must have made a dash for the lodge and tried to reach home.

The whole party followed the track pointed out by the head-forester, and saw that the footmarks came to an abrupt end in the middle of the path, about a hundred paces from the broken pitcher.

"There she turned off toward the Avonne," said Michaud. "Perhaps some one cut off her retreat."

"Why, she has been away for more than an hour!" cried Mme. Michaud.

The same dismay was visible in all faces. The cure hurried toward the lodge, looking along the path; and Michaud, with the same idea in his mind, went in the other direction toward Conches.

"Good heavens! she had a fall here," said Michaud, returning from the point where the footprints ceased in the direction of the Silver Spring to the other point, where they came to an end in the middle of the path. "Look here!" He pointed to a spot where every one saw at once the marks of a headlong fall.

"Those footprints that point toward the woods are marks of stocking-soles," said the cure.

"Of a woman's foot," said the Countess.

"But down there, where the pitcher was broken, there are a man's footprints," added Michaud.

"There is only one set of footmarks that I can see," said the cure, who had returned from following the woman's track as far as the wood.

"Some one had caught her up and carried her off into the wood!" cried Michaud.

"If the footmarks are made by a woman the thing is inexplicable," added Blondet.

"That abominable Nicolas must have been at his games," said Michaud; "he has been lying in wait for La Péchina for several days past. I waited for two hours this morning under the Avonne bridge to catch my gentleman; perhaps he has got some woman to help him."

"It is shocking!" cried the Countess.

"They look upon it as a joke," said the cure, half sadly, half bitterly.

"Oh, La Péchina would not let them hold her!" said Michaud, "she is just the one to swim the Avonne. I will go and look along the river.—Olympe, dear, you must go

home.—And perhaps you, gentlemen, will go with my lady along the way to Conches."

"Oh, what a neighborhood!" said the Countess.

"There are blackguards everywhere," Blondet suggested.

"M. le Cure, is it true that my interference saved this child from old Rigou's clutches?" asked Mme. de Montcornet.

"Any girl under the age of fifteen whom you take to the château will be rescued from that monster," said the Abbe Brossette. "When the apostate tried to get hold of the child, he meant to slake his thirst for vengeance as well as his licentious desires. When I took old Niseron as sacristan, I made him understand what Rigou meant; Rigou used to talk of making reparation for the injuries done him by his uncle, M. Niseron, my predecessor. The ex-mayor bore me a grudge for that, and it swelled his hate. Old Niseron gave Rigou solemn warning that if any harm came to Geneviève, he would kill him, and that he held Rigou responsible for any attempt upon the child. I should not be very far wrong if I saw some infernal plot of his in Nicolas Tonsard's behavior. He thinks he can do as he likes here."

"But is he not afraid of the law?" asked Blondet.

"In the first place, Rigou is the public prosecutor's father-in-law," the cure began. There was a pause; then he went on.—"You would not imagine how utterly indifferent the divisional police and the criminal department are here with regard to such things. So long as the peasants refrain from arson and murder, so long as they pay the taxes and do not poison people, they may do as they please among themselves, and as they have not a vestige of religious principle, the state of things is shocking. On the other side of the valley there are helpless old men, past work, who are afraid to stay in their homes lest they should be starved to death; they are out in the fields as long as their legs will carry them; they know that if they once take to their beds they will die—of sheer hunger. M. Sarcus, the justice of the peace, says that if all criminals were brought to justice, the

government would be bankrupt through expenses of prosecution."

"Well, there is a magistrate who sees things as they are!" exclaimed Blondet.

"Ah, his lordship the bishop knew quite well how things were in this valley, and more especially in this commune," the cure continued. "Religion is the only remedy for such evils; legislation seems to me to be powerless, restricted as it is—"

The cure was interrupted by shrieks from the wood. Emile Blondet and the Abbe, followed by the Countess, plunged boldly in the direction from which the cries came.

XI

THE OARISTYS, THE EIGHTEENTH ECLOGUE OF THEOCRITUS, LITTLE APPRECIATED IN A COURT OF ASSIZE

SOMETHING of the sagacity of the savage, developed in Michaud by his new calling, together with a newly acquired knowledge of the state of feeling and affairs in the commune of Blangy, had just explained, in part, a third Idyl, modelled on the Greek. Impecunious swains like Nicolas Tonsard and well-to-do seniors of the stamp of old Rigou make liberal translations of such Idyls (in school phrase) for the use of remote country districts.

Nicolas, Tonsard's second son, had drawn an unlucky number in the last conscription. Two years previously, thanks to the united efforts of Soudry, Gaubertin, and Money-Sarcus, Nicolas's older brother had been pronounced unfit for military service, on account of some imaginary affection of the muscles of the right arm. Jean-Louis's subsequent dexterity in handling the heaviest implements of husbandry had been much remarked, and had caused some talk in the district.

So Soudry, Rigou, and Gaubertin, who watched over the family, warned Tonsard that Nicolas, a big tall fellow, must not attempt to evade the law of conscription. At the same time, however, both the worthy mayor of Ville-aux-Fayes and Rigou had so lively a sense of the necessity of keeping on good terms with a bold man who might be a useful engine if properly directed against the Aigues, that Rigou held out some hope to the Tonsards, father and son.

Catherine, that devoted sister, paid the unfrocked monk an occasional visit, and was advised to apply to the General and the Countess.

"He maybe would not be sorry to do it to make things sweet, and anyway it would be so much got out of the enemy," said the public prosecutor's terrible father-in-law to Catherine, demanding counsel. "If the Upholsterer refuses—well, we shall see."

In Rigou's forecasts the General's refusal was one more wrong to swell the account of injuries done to the peasants by the great landowner, as well as a fresh cause for gratitude to bind Tonsard to the coalition if the ex-mayor's crafty brain should hit upon some way of liberating Nicolas.

Nicolas, bound to present himself for medical examination in a few days' time, founded little hope on the General's influence, for the Aigues had several grievances against the Tonsards. Nicolas's passion, or, more properly speaking, his fancy or whim for La Péchina was so heated by the notion of an approaching departure which left him no time to carry out his projects concerning her that he determined to try violence.

The contempt that the child showed her persecutor, together with her energetic resistance, had kindled in the Lovelace of the Grand-I-Vert a fury of hate that equalled his frenzy of desire. For three days he had lain in wait for La Péchina, and she, poor child, knew of this. Between the girl and Nicolas there was the same mutual recognition that there is between the sportsman and the game. La Péchina could not go beyond the great iron gates, but Nicolas would

show his face in one of the paths under the park walls, or he was waiting about on the bridge over the Avonne. She could soon have put herself beyond reach of this hateful persecution by speaking to her grandfather, but a strange fear, perhaps a natural instinct, leads even the simplest-natured girls to shrink from confiding in their natural protectors in matters of this kind.

Geneviève, moreover, had heard old Niseron solemnly swear that he would kill any man whatsoever who should dare (his own expression) "to lay a finger on her." (The old man imagined that the white aureole of his own seventy blameless years of life would be a protection to his little granddaughter.) The prospect of a tragedy positively appalling to a girl's lively imagination is quite sufficient to seal her lips; there is no need to explore the recesses of her heart for a multiplication of curious reasons for her silence.

The cow at the Conches gate had calved, and Mme. Michaud was daily sending milk to Gaillard's daughter. Before La Péchina set out on this errand, she always made a survey like a cat about to venture forth from the house. She saw no sign of Nicolas; she "listened to the silence," as the poet says, and hearing nothing, thought that the scoundrel must have gone to his work. The peasants had begun to cut their rye; they always finish their own little patches early, so as to be ready to earn the extra wages paid to harvesters. But Nicolas was not the man to make much ado over the loss of a couple of days' wages, and he was the less likely to grudge them just now because he was going away after the Soulanges fair, and to "go for a soldier" means the beginning of a new life for the peasant.

But when La Péchina, with her pitcher on her head, had come halfway, Nicolas scrambled like a wildcat down the elm-tree, where he lay in hiding among the leaves, and dropped like a thunderbolt at her feet. La Pechina flung away her pitcher, and trusted to her speed to reach the lodge. But Catherine, lying in ambush a hundred paces away, sprang out of the wood and ran up against the little

girl with such force that La Pechina fell over. Catherine picked her up still dazed with the violent shock, and carried her off into an open space among the trees, where the Silver Spring bubbled up in the grass.

Catherine was tall and strong. In all respects she recalled the models selected by painters and sculptors for figures of Liberty and the ideal Republic. Her beauty, which found favor in the eyes of the youth of the valley, was of the same full-bosomed type, she had the same strong pliant figure, the same muscular lower limbs, the plump arms, the eyes that gleamed with a spark of fire, the proud expression, the hair grasped and twisted in thick handfuls, the masculine forehead, the red mouth, the lips that curled back with a smile that had something almost ferocious in it—such a smile as Delacroix and David (of Angers) caught and rendered to admiration. A glowing brunette, the image of the people, the flames of insurrection seemed to leap forth from her clear tawny eyes; there was a soldierly insolence in their piercing gaze. Catherine had inherited from her father a temper so violent that every other member of the family at the tavern feared her, Tonsard excepted.

"Well, how do you feel, old girl?" she asked of La Pechina. Catherine, for her own ends, had set her victim down on a little knoll beside the spring, and had brought her to her senses by splashing cold water in her face.

"Where am I?" asked the little girl, opening her beautiful dark eyes. It was as if a ray of sunlight shone from them.

"Ah! if it hadn't been for me, you would be dead by now," returned Catherine.

"Thank you," said the child, still quite dizzy with her fall. "What can have happened to me?"

"You stumbled over a tree root, and down you went as if a bullet had struck you. Oh! didn't you run too! You bolted away like a mad thing!"

"It was your brother's fault, he caused the accident," said La Pechina, recollecting the sight of Nicolas.

"My brother? I did not see him," said Catherine. "Poor

Nicolas, what may he have done that you are as frightened of him as if he were a bogie? Isn't he better looking than your M. Michaud?"

"Oh!" said La Pechina disdainfully.

"Come, child, you are laying up trouble for yourself by being so fond of those who persecute us! Why are you not on our side?"

"Why do you never set foot in a church? And why do you steal night and day?" the younger girl inquired.

"So you believe what the masters tell you, do you?" retorted Catherine scornfully, and without suspicion of La Pechina's attachment. "The bourgeois are fond of us, as they are fond of their food; they must have a plateful of something new every day. Where may you have seen the bourgeois that would marry one of us peasant girls? Just you see whether Money-Sarcus will allow his son to marry pretty Gatienne Giboulard of Auxerre, though her father is a rich man and a cabinet-maker! You have never been to the Tivoli at Soulanges, Socquard's place. You ought to come. You would see the bourgeois there, that you would! Then you would begin to see that they are hardly worth the money that we make out of them when we get hold of them. Just you come to the fair this year."

"People say that the fair at Soulanges is very fine!" La Pechina cried childishly.

"I will just tell you what it is in two words," Catherine went on. "If you are pretty, they make eyes at you. What is the good of being as pretty as you are if it is not to have the men admire you? Oh! the first time I heard some one say, 'What a fine girl!' the blood in my veins turned to fire. That was at Socquard's, when the dancing was in full swing; grandfather was playing the clarionette, and he smiled, and I thought the Tivoli as big and as fine as heaven. Why, child, it is all lighted up with Argand lamps and looking-glasses; you might think you were in paradise. And all the gentlemen from Soulanges and Auxerre and Ville-aux-Fayes are there. Ever since that night I have loved the place where

those words sounded in my ears like military music. You would bargain away your eternity to hear that said of you, child, by the man you have a liking for!"

"Why, yes; perhaps," said La Pechina dreamily.

"Just come and hear that benediction from a man's lips; you are sure to have it!" cried Catherine. "Lord, a girl as smart as you are stands a good chance of making a fine match! There is M. Lupin's son, Amaury, he has coats with gold buttons all down them; he would be very likely to ask for you in marriage! And that is not all, by any means! If you but knew what a cure for care they keep there! Look here—Socquard's spiced wine would make you forget the biggest troubles. Only imagine it, it puts fancies into your head, you feel lighter!—You have never drunk spiced wine, have you?—Oh, well then, you do not know what life is!"

The grown-up person's privilege of moistening the throat now and again with a glass of spiced wine excites the curiosity of a child under twelve to such a pitch that Geneviève once had put to her lips a glass that the doctor ordered for her grandfather when the old man was ill. That experiment, and a sort of magical memory which it had left in the poor child's mind, may explain the attentive hearing which she gave to Catherine. That wicked creature had counted upon making an impression, to carry out in full a plan which so far had met with success. Doubtless she meant that her victim, half-stunned by her fall, should reach a stage of mental intoxication particularly dangerous for a country girl whose seldom-stirred imagination is so much the more ardent when once heated. The spiced wine, kept in reserve, was to complete the task of turning the victim's head.

"Then what is there in it?" asked La Pechina.

"All sorts of things!" said Catherine, glancing sidewise to see whether her brother was coming. "Thing-um-bobs from the Indies, to begin with, cinnamon and herbs that change you by enchantment. In fact, you feel as if you have everything you want. It makes you happy! You do not care a straw for anything."

"I should be afraid to drink spiced wine while I was dancing!" put in La Pechina.

"Afraid of what?" asked Catherine. "There is not the least thing to be afraid of. Just remember what a lot of people there are about. And all the bourgeois looking on at us! Ah! one day of that kind will help you to bear up against lots of troubles. See it and die, one would be content."

"If only M. and Mme. Michaud would come too—" began La Pechina, her eyes on fire.

"Why, there is your grandfather Niseron, you haven't given him up, have you? Poor dear man, he would feel flattered to see you queening it! Do you really like those *Arminacs*, Michaud and the rest of them, better than your grandfather and us Burgundians? It is not nice to forsake your own kith and kin. And then, besides, what could the Michauds say if your grandfather were to take you to the fair at Soulanges?—Oh! if you only knew what it is to reign over a man, to have him wild about you, to be able to tell him to 'Go there!' as I tell Godain, and he goes, or 'Do this!' and he does it! And rigged out as you are, child, you see, you would completely turn some gentleman's head; M. Lupin's son, for instance.—To think that M. Amaury is sweet upon Marie, my sister, because she has fair hair; and he is afraid of me, as you may say.—But as for you, now that those people at the lodge have smartened you up, you look like an empress."

While Catherine cleverly turned the girl's thoughts away from Nicolas, the better to dispel suspicion in that simple mind, she cunningly distilled the nectar of flattery. Unwittingly she had found the weak spot in her victim's heart. La Pechina, though neither more nor less than a poor peasant girl, was an appalling instance of precocious development, like many a nature destined to end even as they blossom, prematurely. She was a strange freak, produced by crossing the Montenegrin and Burgundian strains, begotten and born amid the turmoil of war, and all these circumstances

had doubtless gone to the molding of her. Thin, slender, and brown as a tobacco-leaf, she possessed incredible physical strength; but her low height was deceptive to the eyes of peasants who know nothing of the mysteries of the nervous system. Nerves do not come within the ken of rural pathology.

Geneviève at thirteen was scarce as tall as other girls of her age, but she had come to her full height. Did she owe to her extraction, or to the sun of Burgundy, the dusky but glowing topaz-tint of her face? the glow of the blood through the dusky transparent tissues, a color that adds years to a girl's apparent age? Medical science would perhaps decline to decide. The premature age of La Pechina's features was atoned for by the brightness—the splendid blaze of light—in the eyes that shone like two stars. Perhaps it is because such eyes are so full of sunlight that they are always shaded by long thick lashes; hers were almost exaggerated in length.

Thick tresses of blue-black hair, fine and long and abundant, rose above a forehead carved like the brows of an antique Juno, but the splendid crown of hair, the great dark eyes, the goddess's brow eclipsed the lower part of the face. The upper part of the nose was regular in shape and slightly aquiline, but below it terminated in blunted nostrils, with something equine about them. In moments of vehement excitement they turned up, a trick of facial expression that gave her a look of fierce frenzy. Like the nose, the rest of the face seemed to have been left unfinished; it was as if clay had been wanting to the hand of the Great Sculptor. The space beneath the mouth was so narrow that any one who should take La Pechina by the chin must have touched her lips; but her teeth diverted attention from this defect. You could almost have credited each one of those little, glistening, enamelled, shapely-cut, translucent bones with intelligent life, and a mouth somewhat too wide made it easy to see them. This last defect was further emphasized by the sinuous curving lines of lips that bore a resemblance to the fantastic branchings of coral.

The shell-like convolutions of her ears were so translucent that they turned to a rose-red in the light. Sunburned though she was, the skin revealed the marvellous fineness of the tissues beneath. If love lies in the sense of touch, as Buffon avers, such a silken skin must have been as subtle and as penetrating as the scent of daturas. Her chest, indeed her whole body, was appallingly thin, but the little hands and feet were bewitchingly small, a sign of unusual nervous power and of an organization capable of endurance.

A fierce pride blended these diabolical imperfections and divine beauties into harmony, in spite of discords; the undaunted spirit housed in the feeble body looked forth from her eyes. Once having seen the child, it was impossible to forget her. Nature had meant to fashion a woman, but the circumstances of conception had given her a boy's face and figure. At sight of the strange girl, a poet would have given her Yemen for her native land and Arabian efreets and genii for her kin. Nor was La Pechina's outward appearance misleading. She had a spirit that matched her eyes of fire, the quick wit suggested by the lips set with the brilliants of bewitching teeth; she had thoughts that fitted her queenly brow, the equine fury of the nostrils that seemed ready to neigh at any moment. Love, as it springs into being amid burning sands and in the deserts, shook the pulses of the heart of twenty years in the thirteen-year-old Montenegrin girl; it was with her as with her snowy mountain ranges, summer had come upon her before the spring flowers had had time to bloom.

By this time observing minds will understand how it was that La Pechina, breathing out passion at every pore, should stir the sluggish fancies of depraved natures. At table your mouth waters at the sight of certain fruits, pitted, contorted, covered with dark specks; the gourmet knows that under such a rind Nature has hidden her cunningest savors and perfume. Why, when every one else in the valley pitied La Pechina for an ill-grown weakling, should a clod-pate like Nicolas Tonsard have set his choice on a

creature worthy of a poet? Why should Rigou, in his old age, desire her with the heat of youth? Which of these two was young or old? Was the young peasant as sated as the old money-lender? How was it that both extremes of life united in one sinister caprice? Is exhausted vigor like the first beginnings of strength? Men's vices are unfathomable depths guarded by sphinxes, and questions to which there are no answers almost always stand at the beginning and end of devious ways.

It may now be imagined how it was that the exclamation *Piccina!* broke from the Countess when she first saw Geneviève by the roadside in the previous year, a child in a maze of wonder at the sight of the carriage and a lady inside it dressed like Mme. de Montcornet. And it was this girl, so nearly one of Nature's failures in the making, who now loved with all the energy of her Montenegrin nature. She loved the tall, handsome, noble-hearted forester, as children of her age can love when they love, that is to say with a frenzy of childish desire, with all the force of their youth, with the devotion which sows the seeds of divine romance in a virgin soil. Catherine's coarse hand had smitten the most responsive strings of a harp strained to breaking. To dance under Michaud's eyes! To go to the saloon at Soulanges! To engrave herself upon the memory of this idolized master! What thoughts were these to drop into that volcanic brain? What was this but to fling live coals upon straw lying out in the August sun?

"No, Catherine," said La Pechina. "No, I am an ugly, puny thing. I shall have to sit in a corner and be an old maid all alone in the world; that is my fate."

"Men like peaked-looking girls," Catherine declared. "Look here at me!" she went on, holding out both arms. "There is Godain, a regular shrimp, has taken a fancy to me; so has that little fellow Charles that goes about with the Count. But young Lupin is shy of me. I tell you again, it is the little men that fall in love with me and say 'What a fine girl!' at Ville-aux-Fayes or Soulanges.

Now all the tall, fine-looking men will fall in love with you."

"Oh, Catherine, *really?* is that true?" cried La Pechina in an ecstasy.

"Why, it is as true as this, that Nicolas, the finest fellow in the neighborhood, is over head and ears in love with you. He dreams of you, and gets low about you, and all the girls in the place are in love with him. He is a mettled lad!—If you put on a white frock and yellow ribbons, you will be the handsomest girl in the room at Socquard's, at the feast of Our Lady, when all the grand folk of Ville-aux-Fayes are there! Look here, will you come?—Wait a bit, I was cutting grass yonder for our cows. I have a drop of spiced wine in my gourd; Socquard gave it me this morning," she went on, seeing in La Pechina's eyes the excited look that every woman understands; "I am a good-natured one, we will go shares at it. You will fancy that some one is in love with you."

As they talked Nicolas came stealing toward them, picking out patches of thick grass to step upon, creeping noiselessly till he reached the trunk of a huge oak-tree near the place where his sister had deposited La Pechina. Catherine's eyes, always looking about her, lighted at last on Nicolas as she went for the spiced wine.

"There! you take the first pull," said she.

"It burns!" exclaimed Geneviève, handing back the gourd after a couple of sips.

"There, you silly!" retorted Catherine, as she emptied the rustic flask, "that is the way! It is as if a ray of sunlight shone in your inside."

"And here am I that ought to have taken the milk to Mlle. Gaillard!" cried La Pechina. "Nicolas scared me—"

"So you don't like Nicolas?"

"No, I don't," answered La Pechina. "What makes him hunt me about? There are plenty of creatures that would be glad of him."

"But suppose that he likes you better than any one else in the valley, child—"

"I am sorry for him," said La Pechina.

"It is plain that you do not know him," returned the older girl.

The ominous words were hardly uttered before Catherine Tonsard sprang upon La Pechina, caught her by the waist, flung her flat upon the grass and held her down, so that she had no power to extricate herself from her perilous position. At the sight of her loathed persecutor, Geneviève shrieked with all her might, and directed a kick in the stomach at Nicolas which sent him reeling five paces back; then like an acrobat she wriggled round so deftly that she defeated Catherine's calculations and got up to run away. But Catherine, still on the ground, reached out an arm and clutched her by the foot, and La Pechina fell heavily headlong forward. This ugly fall put a stop to the brave girl's incessant cries. Nicolas, who had recovered himself in spite of the violence of the blow, came up in a towering rage and tried to seize his victim. The child's head was heavy with the wine, but in this strait she caught Nicolas by the throat and held him in an iron grip.

"She is choking me! . . . Catherine! help!" cried Nicolas, with difficulty making his voice audible.

La Pechina shrieked aloud. Catherine tried to stop the sounds by putting a hand over her mouth, but the child bit her till the blood came. At that very moment Blondet and the Countess and the cure appeared on the outskirts of the wood.

"Here come the gentry from the Aigues," said Catherine, helping Geneviève to rise.

"Do you want to live?" said Nicolas Tonsard hoarsely.

"And if I do?" said La Pechina.

"Tell them that we were romping and I will forgive you," said Nicolas with a scowl.

"Are you going to say that, you cat?" insisted Catherine, with a glance more terrific than Nicolas's murderous threat.

"Yes, if you will let me alone," said La Pechina. "Anyhow I shall not go out again without my scissors."

"You hold your tongue or I will chuck you into the Avonne," said Catherine savagely.

"You are wretches!" cried the cure. "You deserve to be arrested and sent up for trial for this."

"Oh, as to that, what do some of you do in your drawing-rooms?" asked Nicolas, staring at the Countess and Blondet, who quailed. "You play there, don't you? All right, the fields are our playground, and you cannot always be at work; we were playing. You ask my sister and La Pechina."

"What can you do when it comes to blows if this is the way you play?" exclaimed Blondet.

Nicolas looked at Blondet with a deadly hate in his eyes.

"Speak up!" said Catherine, taking La Pechina by the forearm and gripping it till she left a blue bracelet of bruises round it. "We were having a game, weren't we?—"

"Yes, my lady, we were having a game," said La Pechina. The child's whole strength was exhausted; she stood limp and drooping as if she were about to faint.

"You hear that, my lady," said Catherine brazenly, with a glance that between woman and woman is like a stab.

She took her brother's arm and the pair walked off together. They knew quite well what ideas they had given the three personages behind them. Twice Nicolas looked round; twice he encountered Blondet's eyes. The literary man was scanning the tall, broad-shouldered rascal. Nicolas stood five feet eight inches high; he had crisp black hair, a high color, his face was good-tempered enough, but there were significant lines about the lips and mouth that suggested the cruelty peculiar to lust and idleness. Catherine swayed her white-and-blue-striped skirts as she went with a sort of vicious coquetry.

"Cain and his wife," said Blondet, turning to the cure.

"You do not know how well your words have hit the mark," returned the Abbe Brossette.

"Oh! M. le Cure, what will they do to me?" cried La Pechina, as soon as the brother and sister were out of earshot.

The Countess's face was as white as her handkerchief. The whole thing had been a great shock to her, so great that she heard neither La Pechina, nor the cure, nor Blondet.

"This would drive one from an earthly paradise," she said at last; "but of all things let us save this little one from their clutches."

"You were right," Blondet said in a low voice meant only for the Countess. "The child is a whole romance—a romance in flesh and blood."

The Montenegrin girl had reached a point when body and soul seem to smoke with the unquenched fires of wrath which have put the utmost strain on every faculty, physical and mental.

There is an inexpressible and supreme human splendor which only breaks forth under the pressure of some high-wrought mood of struggle or of victory, of love or martyrdom. She had left home that morning in a frock of a material of narrow brown-and-yellow stripes, with a little frill at the throat that she had risen early to pleat into her dress; and now she stood as yet unconscious of the disorder of her earth stained garments or her torn frill. Her hair strayed down over her face, she felt for her comb; but with that first dawn of dismay Michaud appeared upon the scene; he also had heard the cries. All La Pechina's energy returned at once at the sight of her god.

"He did not so much as lay a finger on me, M. Michaud!"

That cry and its accompanying glance and gesture, which spoke more eloquently than the words, told Blondet and the cure in one moment more than Mme. Michaud had told the Countess of the strange girl's passion for the head-forester, who was blind to it.

"The wretch!" exclaimed Michaud; and acting on an impulse of impotent wrath which takes the fool and the wise alike at unawares, he shook his fist in the direction of Nico-

las, whose tall figure darkened the wood-paths into which he had plunged with his sister.

"Then you were not playing after all," commented the Abbe Brossette, with a keen glance at La Pechina.

"Do not tease her," said the Countess. "Let us go home."

La Pechina, spent though she was, drew from the force of her passion sufficient strength to walk—under the eyes of her adored master. The Countess followed immediately behind Michaud, along a footpath known only to keepers and poachers, and so narrow that two could not walk abreast in it. It was a short cut to the Avonne gate.

"Michaud," the lady began, when they had come halfway through the wood, "the neighborhood must be rid somehow or other of this good-for-nothing scamp. This child is perhaps in danger of her life."

"To begin with," returned Michaud, "Geneviève shall never leave the lodge. My wife shall take Vatel's nephew into the house; he keeps the walks in order in the park. We will replace him by a young fellow who comes from near my wife's home, for after this we ought to have no one about the Aigues whom we cannot trust. With Gounod in the house, and Cornevin, Olympe's old foster-father, the cows will be well looked after, and La Pechina shall never go out by herself again."

"I shall ask the Count to make good the extra expense to you," said the lady; "but this will not rid us of Nicolas. How can it be done?"

"Oh, that is quite simple; there is a way ready made. Nicolas will have to go before the examining committee directly. Instead of interfering to get him off, as the Tonsards expect the General to do, he has only to give the authorities a hint—"

"I will go myself if need be to see my cousin Casteran at the prefecture," said the Countess, "but meanwhile, I am afraid—"

These few words were exchanged at the point where sev-

eral paths met in a circle. The Countess climbed the bank by the ditch side, and, in spite of herself, a cry broke from her. Michaud went to her assistance, thinking that she had received a scratch from a bit of dead thorn, but he too shuddered at the sight that met his eyes.

Marie and Bonnebault, sitting on the bank side, were apparently chatting together; but evidently the pair had hidden themselves for purposes of eavesdropping. They had heard people come up in the forest, had recognized the voices of the gentry, and left their sentinel's post.

Bonnebault, a thin lanky youth, had served six years in a cavalry regiment. Some few months ago he had been discharged for good from the army for bad conduct; he was enough to spoil the best of regiments; and since then he had been hanging about Conches. With a pair of mustaches, a tuft of beard on the chin, a certain presence and carriage that a soldier learns in barracks and drill, he had turned the heads of all the peasant girls in the valley. Bonnebault wore his hair, soldier fashion, clipped close to the back of the head, frizzed about the face, and brushed up jauntily behind on the temples. He tilted his foraging cap knowingly over one ear. Indeed, compared with peasants in rags and tatters like Mouche and Fourchon, he was a glorious creature in his linen trousers, leather boots, and short jacket. This attire, assumed since his discharge, smacked somewhat of half-pay and a countryman's life; but the cock of the valley had better clothes for high days and holidays. He lived, it may be said at once, on his sweethearts, and found his means barely sufficient for his amusements, potations, and various methods of going to the devil, a necessary consequence of hanging about the Cafe de la Paix.

There was something indescribably sinister in the rascal's round, featureless countenance, though at first sight he looked not unpleasing. He was cross-eyed; that is, he did not exactly squint, but his eyes sometimes "went different ways," to borrow a phrase from the studio, and this optical defect, slight though it was, gave him an underhand expression

which made you feel uncomfortable; and the more so because a twitch of the forehead and eyebrows accompanied these movements of the eyes—a revelation of a certain inherent baseness and an innate tendency to go to the bad.

Of cowardice, as of courage, there be many kinds. Bonnebault, who would have fought on the field with the bravest, was pusillanimous before his vices and unable to resist his fancies. He was as lazy as a lizard, though he could be active enough when he chose; he had no sense of shame, he was proud and yet base, and the man who could do anything and did nothing, the "breaker of heads and hearts," to use a soldier's phrase, found his sole delight in mischief and worse. A character of this kind is as dangerous an example in a quiet country place as in a regiment.

Bonnebault's aim, like Tonsard's and Fourchon's, was to live in comfort and to do nothing; and to that end he had "laid himself out," as Vermichel and Fourchon would say. By exploiting his figure, with increasing success, and his skill at billiards, with varying fortune, he flattered himself that in his quality of prop and pillar of the Cafe de la Paix he should one day marry Mlle. Aglaé Socquard, only daughter of the proprietor thereof. Socquard's cafe (making due allowance for relative position) was to Soulanges much what *Ranelagh* is to the Bois de Boulogne. To adopt the career of a barkeeper, to be proprietor of a dancing-saloon—'twas a fine prospect, a very marshal's bâton, for a man who hated work.

Bonnebault's habits, life and nature were written in such foul characters on his face that the Countess started at the sight of him and his companion as if she had seen a couple of snakes. It was this shock that had made her cry out.

Marie Tonsard was so infatuated with Bonnebault that for him she would have stolen outright. That mustache, that lounging military swagger, that low bully's air, went to her heart as the manners, bearing and air of a De Marsay fascinate Parisian fair. Every social sphere has its bright particular stars. Marie was uneasy, she dismissed Amaury,

the rival coxcomb of the little town. She meant to be Mme. Bonnebault.

"Hallo there! hallo! are you coming?" shouted Catherine and Nicolas in the distance; they had caught sight of the other pair.

The shrill cry rang through the woods like a savage's signal.

Michaud shuddered at the sight of the two creatures and bitterly repented his hasty speech. If Bonnebault and Marie had overheard the conversation nothing but mischief would come of it. Some such apparently infinitely trifling matter was enough in the present exasperated condition of parties to bring about a decisive result, even as upon some battlefield victory and defeat have been decided by the course of some little stream which balks the advance of the battery, though a shepherd's lad can cross it at a running jump.

Bonnebault took off his cap gallantly to the lady, took Marie's arm, and swaggered off in triumph.

"That is the *Clef-des-Cœurs* of the valley," Michaud whispered, using a nickname of the French camp which means a Don Juan. "He is a very dangerous character. He has only to lose a score of francs at billiards and he would be ready to murder Rigou. He is as ready for a crime as for pleasure."

"I have seen more than enough for one day," said the Countess, taking Emile's arm. "Let us turn back."

She watched La Pechina go into the house, and made Mme. Michaud a sad farewell sign; Olympe's dejection had infected the Countess.

"What is this, madame?" said the Abbe Brossette. "Do the difficulties of doing good here really turn you away from making the attempt? For five years I have slept on a mattress and lived in a bare unfurnished parsonage-house, saying mass without a flock to listen to it, preaching to an empty church, officiating without fees or supplementary stipend; I have the State allowance of six hundred francs; I give away one-third of it, and have asked nothing of his lordship

the bishop—and after all I do not despair. If you but knew what it is like in the winter here you would feel all the force of those words. I have nothing to warm me but the thought of saving this valley and winning it back to God. It is not a question of ourselves alone, madame; the future time is concerned. If we cures are put here to say to the poor, 'Know how to be poor!' that is to say, 'Bear your lot in patience and work,' it is no less our duty to bid the wealthy 'Know how to be rich,' which means, 'Be intelligently beneficent, fear God, be worthy of the post He has assigned to you!'

"Well, madame, you are only depositaries of wealth and the power that wealth gives; if you fail to fulfil your trust you will not transmit that which you received to your children. You are robbing those that shall come after you! If you follow in the selfish ways of the *cantatrice*, whose supineness most surely caused the evils which have startled you by their extent, you will see yet again the scaffolds on which your predecessors died for the sins of their fathers. To do good obscurely in some out-of-the way nook, just as this Rigou, for example, is doing harm . . . . Ah! God in Heaven delights to hear the prayer that takes the form of such deeds as these!—If, in every commune, there were three human beings determined to do good, this fair France of ours would be saved from the depths toward which we are hurrying, dragged down as we are by a creed of indifference to all that does not directly concern ourselves!—First of all change your lives; change them and you will change your laws."

Although the Countess was deeply moved by this outpouring of truly Catholic charity, her only answer was the rich man's fatal formula, "We shall see," a put-off that contains sufficient promise in it to repel any immediate call upon the purse, while it leaves the speaker free in future to fold his arms when the mischief is done, and to plead that now it is too late.

Upon this the Abbe Brossette took leave of Mme. de Montcornet, and went by the nearest way to the Blangy gate.

"Is Belshazzar's Feast to be throughout all ages the symbol of the last days of a doomed class, oligarchy, or ruling power?" he asked himself when he had made ten paces on his way. "O God, if it be Thy holy will to let loose the poor like a deluge that there may be a new world, then I can understand that Thou wouldst abandon the rich man to his blindness."

XII

SHOWS HOW THE TAVERN IS THE PEOPLE'S PARLIAMENT

MEANWHILE, by screaming at the top of her voice, Granny Tonsard had brought several people from Blangy, curious to know what could have happened at the Grand-I-Vert. Blangy itself was about as near to the tavern as the Blangy gate of the park. Among those attracted thus, who should be there but old Niseron—La Pechina's grandfather, who had just rung the second Angelus, and was on his way back to train the last vine-stems on his last bit of ground!

All the honesty left in the commune had taken up its abode in the old vinedresser, whose back was bent with toil, whose features were blanched and hair whitened with age. During the Revolution he had been the president of the Villeaux-Fayes Jacobin Club and a sworn member of the local Revolutionary Committee. Jean-François Niserson was composed of the stuff of which apostles are made. In years gone by he had been the very image of Saint Peter, the saint whose portrait never varies with any painter's brush; he had the square forehead of the man of the people, the stiff crisped hair of the toiler, the proletarian's muscles, the fisherman's bronzed face, the powerful nose, the half-satirical mouth that laughs at ill-luck, and (a final characteristic) the shoulders of the strong man who will cut his fagots in the neighboring wood and cook his dinner while doctrinaires are talking about it.

This was Niseron as a man of forty at the time when the Revolution broke out, a man as hard as iron and as honest as the day. He took the side of the people, he put his faith in the Republic with the first mutterings of a word perhaps even more to be dreaded than the idea behind it. He believed in the Republic of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the brotherhood of man, the exchange of noble sentiments, the public recognition of merit, in a fair field and no favor, in a great many things, in fact, which, though quite practicable in a district no bigger than ancient Sparta, become Utopian visions when the area in question is expanded into an empire. He subscribed to his theories with his blood; his only son went to the frontier: he did more; for them he made the sacrifice of his pecuniary interests, that final immolation of self. He was the nephew and sole heir of the old cure of Blangy, who died and left all his money to pretty Arsène, his servant-girl; and though Niseron, as a tribune, was all-powerful in the district and might have helped himself to his heritage, he respected the wishes of the dead, and accepted the poverty which came upon him as swiftly as the decadence on his Republic.

Not a groat, not a branch of a tree belonging to another passed into his hands. If this sublime Republican could have founded a school the Republic would have been accepted. He declined to buy the National lands, denying the Republic the right of confiscation. In response to the demands of the Committee of Public Safety he was determined that the manhood of the citizens should work for the holy fatherland the miracles that political jugglers tried to effect with gold coin. The man of antiquity publicly upbraided Gaubertin senior with his treacherous double-dealing, with winking at corruption, with picking and stealing. He soundly rated the virtuous Mouchon, that Representative of the People, whose virtue mainly consisted in his incapacity, as was the case with plenty of his like who, strong with the might of a whole nation, with absolute command of the most enormous political resources that ever nation put at

the disposition of its rulers, attained fewer great achievements with the strength of a people than a Richelieu with the weakness of a king. For these reasons Citizen Niseron became a living reproach to everybody else, and before long the good soul was overwhelmed and buried under the avalanche of oblivion by the terrible formula, "Nothing pleases him!"—a catch-word in favor with those who have grown fat on sedition.

This "peasant of the Danube" returned under his own roof at Blangy. He watched his illusions vanish one by one, saw his Republic become an appendage of the Emperor, and sank into penury under the eyes of Rigou, who deliberately ruined him with hypocritical regret. Do you ask why? Jean-François Niseron would not take a penny of Rigou. Reiterated refusals had taught the wrongful inheritor of old Niseron's goods the depth of the scorn with which the rightful heir regarded him. And, to crown all, the icy contempt had just been succeeded by the fearful threat as to the little granddaughter when the Abbe Brossette mentioned her to the Countess.

The old man had written a history of the twelve years of the Republic. It was a history written to suit his own notions; it was full of the grandiose traits for which those heroic times will be remembered forever. The good man shut his eyes to all the scandals, slaughter and spoliation; he always dwelt admiringly on the self-sacrifice, the *Vengeur*, the "patriotic gifts," the enthusiasm of the people on the frontiers; he went on with his dream the better to sleep.

The Revolution made many poets like old Niseron, poets who sang their songs within our borders or in our armies, in their inmost souls, in the broad light of day, in many a deed done unseen amid the storm-clouds of those times; even as in the days of the Empire the wounded left forgotten on the field would cry "Long live the Emperor!" before they died. This sublimity is a part of the very nature of France.

The Abbe Brossette respected Niseron's harmless convic-

tions. The old man in the simplicity of his heart had been won by a chance phrase: "The true Republic," the priest had said, "is to be found in the Gospel." And the old Republican carried the crucifix; and he wore the vestment, half black, half red; and he was decorous and serious in church, and he lived by the triple functions which he fulfilled, thanks to the Abbe Brossette, who tried to give the good man not a living, but enough to keep him from starving.

The old Aristides of Blangy said but little, like all noble dupes who wrap themselves round in the mantle of resignation; but he never failed to reprove evil-doing, and the peasants feared him as thieves fear the police. At the Grand-I-Vert they always made much of him, but he did not go there half a dozen times in the year. He would execrate the lack of charity in the rich, their selfishness revolted him, and the peasants always took this fibre in his nature for something that he had in common with them. They used to say, "Old Niseron is no friend to the rich folk, so he is one of us"; and a noble life received by way of civic crown the comment, "Good Daddy Niseron; there is not a better man!" He was not seldom called in to settle disputes, and in person realized the magic words, "the village elder."

In spite of his dire poverty he was exceedingly tidy in person. He always wore breeches, thick striped stockings, iron-bound shoes, the coat with big buttons that once was almost a national costume, and the broad-brimmed felt hat—such as old peasants wear even now. On working days he appeared in a short blue jacket so threadbare that you could see the manner of its weaving. There was a noble something that cannot be described in his face and bearing, the pride of a man who feels that he is free and worthy of his freedom. In short, he wore clothes, and did not go about in rags.

"What has been happening out of the common, granny? I heard you from the steeple!" he remarked.

Then the old man heard the whole story of Vatel's frustrated attempt; every one spoke at once after the fashion of country folk.

"If you did not cut the tree, Vatel was in the wrong; but if you *did* cut the tree, you have done two bad things," pronounced Father Niseron.

"Just take a drop of wine!" put in Tonsard, offering a brimming glass.

"Shall we set off?" asked Vermichel, looking at Brunet.

"Yes. We can do without Daddy Fourchon; we can take the deputy-mayor from Conches with us instead," said Brunet. "Go on ahead, I have a paper to leave at the château; Daddy Rigou has gained his case, and I must give notice of judgment." And Brunet, fortified by a couple of nips of brandy, remounted his gray mare, with a good day to Father Niseron, for everybody in the valley looked up to the old man.

No science, nay, no practiced statistician, can obtain statistics of the more than telegraphic speed with which news spreads through country districts, no account of the ways by which it crosses waste wildernesses (the standing reproach of French administrators and French capital). It is a bit of well-known contemporary history that a banker prince rode his horses to death between the field of Waterloo and Paris (for he, needless to say, was gaining what the Emperor had lost—to wit, a kingdom), yet after all he only reached the capital a few hours ahead of the disastrous tidings. So within an hour of the time when Granny Tonsard fell out with Vatel a good many regular customers had dropped in at the Grand-I-Vert.

The first to come was Courtecuisse. You would have found it hard to recognize in him the jolly gamekeeper, the fat Friar John, for whom it may be remembered his wife had boiled the coffee and milk on a certain morning not so very long back. He looked years older, he had grown thin and wan, a dreadful object-lesson to eyes that took no heed of the warning.

"He had a mind to go up higher than the ladder," so it was said when anybody pitied the ex-keeper and blamed Rigou; "he wanted to turn master."

And indeed when Courtecuisse bought the Bâchelerie he

had meant to "turn master," and had boasted as much. His wife went out collecting manure. Before daybreak she and Courtecuisse were at work digging their richly manured garden plot, which brought in several successive crops in the year, and yet they only just managed to pay Rigou the interest due on the balance of the purchase-money. Their daughter in service at Auxerre sent her wages to her father and mother; but do what they might, and in spite of this help, the balance was now due, and they had not a brass farthing.

Mme. Courtecuisse had been used to indulge now and again in a bottle of spiced wine and sugared toast. Now she drank nothing but water. Courtecuisse scarcely trusted himself inside the Grand-I-Vert lest he should be drawn into laying out three-halfpence. He was no longer a person to be courted. He had lost his free nips at the tavern, and, like all fools, he whined about ingratitude. In fact, he was going the way of all peasants bitten with the wish to own land; he was ill-nourished, and found the work heavier and heavier as the food grew less.

"Courtecuisse has put too much in bricks and mortar," said the envious. "He should have waited till he was master before he began to plant wall-fruit."

The simpleton had made improvements, brought the three acres sold by Rigou into high cultivation, and lived in fear of being turned out! The man who once wore leather shoes and sportsman's gaiters now went about in sabots, and dressed no better than old Fourchon. And he laid the blame of his hard life on the gentry at the Aigues! Gnawing care had made the once chubby, jovial little man so dull and sullen that he looked like a victim of slow poison or some incurable disease.

"What can be the matter with you, M. Courtecuisse? Has some one cut your tongue out?" asked Tonsard, when the tale of the recent encounter had been told and the newcomer was silent.

"That would be a pity," said La Tonsard; "he has no

call to complain of the midwife who cut his tongue-string; she made a good job of it."

"Thinking of ways to pay off M. Rigou freezes your gab," complained the old man, grown so much older in so short a time.

"Pooh!" said Granny Tonsard. "You have a good-looking girl; she will be seventeen now; if she behaves wisely you will easily settle with that old scribbler yonder—"

"We sent her away to old Mme. Mariotte at Auxerre two years ago on purpose to keep her out of harm's way. I would sooner die than let her—"

"What a fool!" put in Tonsard. "Look at my girls: are they dead? Any one who should say that they were not as steady as stone images would have to answer for it to my gun."

"It would be very hard to have to go out of the place yonder!" cried Courtecuisse, shaking his head. "I had sooner some one paid me for shooting down one of those *Arminacs!*"

"Oh, a girl would do better to save her father than to keep her virtue till it mildews," retorted Tonsard. He felt a little sharp tap on his shoulder as he spoke. It was Father Niseron.

"That was not well said," began the old man. "A father is the guardian of the honor of his family. It is just such doings that draw down contempt on us, and they say that the people are not fit to have liberty. The people ought to set the rich an example of honor and civic virtues. You all sell yourselves to Rigou for gold; every one of you! When you do not give him your daughters, you sell your own manhood! That is bad."

"Just see what Short Boots has come to!" said Tonsard.

"Just see what I have come to!" returned old Niseron. "I sleep in peace; there are no thorns in my pillow."

"Let him talk, Tonsard," said La Tonsard in her husband's ear. "You know very well that that is his crotchet, poor dear!"

Bonnebault and Marie, and Catherine and her brother all came in at that moment. All four were in a bad humor over the failure of Nicolas's scheme, and Michaud's proposal overheard by them had been the last straw. So Nicolas, once under the paternal roof, broke into a frightful outburst against the Aigues and the whole Michaud establishment.

"Here is the harvest beginning! Well, now, I am not going away until I have lighted my pipe at their ricks," he shouted, bringing down his fist with a bang on the table at which he sat.

"There is no need to yelp like that before anybody and everybody," said Godain, pointing to old Niseron.

"If he were to tell tales, I would wring his neck like a chicken's," put in Catherine. "He has had his day: a meddlesome old fault-finder! Virtuous they call him! It is his temperament, that is all!"

It was a strange and curious sight to see all the upturned faces of the folk gathered together in that den, while Granny Tonsard stood sentinel at the door, lest any one should overhear the talk over the liquor.

But the most alarming among all those faces belonged to Godain, Catherine's wooer; the most alarming and yet the least striking face in the tavern. Godain was a miser who lacked gold—a miser, that is, of the most pitiless kind; does not the hoardless miser take precedence of the miser who broods over his treasure? The latter looks within himself, but the other gazes into the future with a dreadful fixity. This Godain was a type which seemed to represent the most numerous class among the peasantry. Godain was short, so short that he had been exempted from military service. He was naturally thin, and toil and the dull frugality which saps the life of such insatiable workers as Courtecuisse had still further dried him up. His little meagre face was lighted by two yellow eyes, streaked with green threads, and specked with brown. The greed of gain, of gain at any price, which shone in them, was steeped in a cold-blooded sensuality; de-

sires once hot and vehement had cooled and hardened like lava. The skin was strained tightly over the brown, mummy-like temples, the hairs of a scanty beard grew here and there among the wrinkles like cornstalks among the furrows. Nothing wrung sweat from Godain; he reabsorbed his substance. The sinewy, indefatigable hands like hairy claws might have been made of old seasoned wood. He was barely seven and twenty, yet there were white threads already among the rusty black hair.

As to dress, he wore a blouse, which gave glimpses through the fastening of a coarse linen shirt, which to all appearance he only changed once a month, and washed himself in the Thune. His sabots were mended with scraps of old iron. It was impossible to pronounce on the original material of his trousers, for the darns and patches which covered it were infinite. Finally, he wore a shocking cap, evidently picked up on the doorstep of some tradesman's house in Ville-aux-Fayes.

Godain was clear-sighted enough to see the value of the elements of latent fortune in Catherine. He meant to succeed Tonsard at the Grand-I-Vert, and with that end in view he put forth all his cunning, all his power, to capture her. He promised her that she should be rich, he promised that she should have all the license which her mother had taken; before he had finished he had promised his future father-in-law a heavy rent for his tavern, five hundred francs a year until the place was paid for; Godain had had an interview with Brunet, and on the heads of that interview he hoped to pay in stamped paper. As a journeyman agricultural implement maker, this gnome would work for the plowwright when work was plentiful; but he took the highly-paid overtime jobs. He had invested some eighteen hundred francs with Gaubertin, but not a soul knew of the money, and he lived like a miserably poor man, lodging in a garret in his master's house, and gleaning at harvest-time, but he carried Gaubertin's receipt about him, sewn into the band of his Sunday trousers, and saw it renewed each year; each year

the amount was a little larger, swelled by his savings and the interest.

"Eh! what's that to me?" shouted Nicolas, in reply to Godain's prudent observation. "If I am to go for a soldier, I would sooner that the sawdust drank my blood at once than give it drop by drop.—And I will rid the neighborhood of one of these *Arminacs* which the devil has let loose upon us." And with that he told the tale of the so-called plot which Michaud had woven against him.

"Where would you have France look for her soldiers?" the old man asked gravely. During the silence that followed on Nicolas's hideous threat he had risen and faced the young man.

"A fellow serves his time in the army and comes back again," said Bonnebault, curling his mustache.

Old Niseron saw that all the black sheep of the district had come together; he shook his head and went out, leaving a farthing with Mme. Tonsard to pay for his glass of wine. There was a general stir of satisfaction among those who sat drinking as soon as the good man had set foot on the steps. It would have been plain to any onlooker that they all felt constraint in the presence of this embodiment of their conscience.

"Well, now, what do *you* say to all this, hey! Short Boots?" asked Vaudoyer, who suddenly appeared and heard the tale of Vatel's exploit from Tonsard.

Courtecuisse (short shanks), whose name was nearly always transformed in this way into "short boots," clicked his tongue against the roof of his mouth, and set down his glass on the table.

"Vatel is in the wrong," he answered. "In the old mother's place, I should bruise my ribs and take to my bed, I would say I was ill, and I would summon the Upholsterer and his keeper for sixty francs of damages. M. Sarcus would give them to you."

"Anyhow, the Upholsterer would give the money to avoid the fuss that might be made about it," said Godain.

Vaudoyer, ex-policeman, five feet six inches in height, with a face pitted by the smallpox, and hollowed out after the nut-cracker pattern, held his peace, and looked dubious at this.

"Well, what now?" asked Tonsard, whose mouth watered for those sixty francs. "What is ruffling you now, great noodle? Sixty francs to my mother would put me in the way of making something out of it! We will raise a racket for three hundred francs, and M. Gourdon might as well go up to the Aigues and tell them that mother's hip has been put out."

"And they would put it out for her," his wife went on; "these things are done in Paris."

"That would cost too much," objected Godain.

"I have heard too much talk about the lawyers to feel sure that things will go as you wish," Vaudoyer said at last; he had often been present in court, and had assisted ex-sergeant Soudry. "At Soulanges it would be all right even now; M. Soudry represents the Government, and there is no love lost between him and the Upholsterer. But if you attack Vatel, they will be sharp enough to defend the case; and they will say, 'The woman was in the wrong; she had a sapling in her bundle, or she would have let the forester look into her fagots on the road; she would not have run away; and if anything happened to her, she has only her own misdoings to blame for it.' No, it is not a case to be sure of."

"Did the master defend the case when I summoned him?" said Courtecuisse. "Not he. He paid me."

"I will go to Soulanges if you like," said Bonnebault, "and ask M. Gourdon, the registrar, what he thinks, and I will let you know this evening if there is anything in it."

"You only want an excuse for going to see that great goose, Socquard's girl," said Marie Tonsard, slapping Bonnebault on the shoulder as if she meant to sound his lungs.

Just at that moment came a fragment of an old Burgundian Christmas carol:

"A brave deed once He did, I wot,
Whenas our Lord did dine,
The water in the waterpot
He turned to Malmsey wine."

Everybody recognized Daddy Fourchon's voice, raised in a ditty which must have been peculiarly pleasing to the old man. Mouche piped an accompaniment in childish treble.

"Oh, they have had a blowout!" Granny Tonsard called out to her daughter; "your father is as red as a gridiron, and the child is dyed the color of a vine-stem."

"Hail!" cried the old man, "you rascals are here in full force!—Hail!" he added, turning suddenly on his granddaughter, who had her arms about Bonnebault. "Hail, Mary! full of vices, Satan be with thee, cursed be thou above all women, and the rest of it.—Hail, fellows! You are caught now! You may say good-by to your sheaves! Here is news for you! I told you so, I told you that the master yonder would be one too many for you! Well, then, he will have the law of you, and make you smart for it!—Ah! see what comes of measuring yourselves with the bourgeois! The bourgeois have made so many laws that they have a law for every little thing—"

Here an alarming hiccough suddenly gave a new direction to the venerable orator's ideas.

"If Vermichel were here, I would blow down his throat; he should know what Alicante means! Ah! that is a wine! If I were not a Burgundian, I would be a Spaniard! A wine of God! The Pope says mass with it, I know! What a wine!—I am young again!—I say, Short Boots, if your wife were here—I think she would be young too! Spanish wine beats spiced wine; no question about it!—There ought to be another Revolution, only to clear out the cellars—"

"But what is the news, dad?" asked Tonsard.

"There will be no harvest for the like of you. The Upholsterer will put a stop to the gleaning!"

"Stop the gleaning!" Every voice in the tavern went up as one voice, dominated by the shrill notes of four women.

"Yes," piped Mouche; "and he will issue a proclamation by Groison, and have notices stuck up all over the canton; and no one is to glean except those who have paupers' certificates."

"And, get hold of the meaning of *this*," said Fourchon, "other communes will not be allowed to sneak in."

"What's up?" said Bonnebault. "Neither my grandmother nor I, nor your mother, Godain, are to be allowed to glean here? Pretty tricks these of the authorities! Plague take them!—Why this General, your mayor, is a perfect hell-broke-loose—"

"Are you going to glean all the same, Godain?" asked Tonsard, turning to the plowwright's assistant, who was talking aside with Catherine.

"*I?*" asked Godain. "I have nothing; so I am a pauper, and I shall ask for a certificate."

"Just tell me what they gave daddy for his otter, honey?" said the comely mistress of the house. Mouche, sitting on his aunt's knee, was quite overcome by the effort to digest his late meal; his eyes were heavy with the two bottles of wine consumed therewith, but he laid his head on his aunt's neck, and murmured cunningly—

"I do not know; but he has gold!—Keep me like a fighting-cock for a month, and I might find out for you where he hides his money, for he has a hoard somewhere."

"Father has gold!" said La Tonsard in low tones, meant only for her husband, whose voice rose above the storm of heated discussion in which the whole tavern joined.

"Hush!" cried the old sentinel. "Here's Groison!"

Deep silence prevailed in the tavern. When Groison might be supposed to be out of earshot, Granny Tonsard gave the signal, and again the discussion broke out:

Would it be possible to glean as heretofore without a pauper's certificate?

"You will be made to obey, that is certain," said old Fourchon, "for the Upholsterer has gone to see the prefect and ask him to call the soldiers out to keep order. They will shoot you down like dogs—which we are!" wailed the old man, struggling with the torpid influence which the Alicante exerted on his tongue.

This second announcement made by Fourchon, preposterous though it was, produced an effect. The audience grew thoughtful; they quite believed that the Government was capable of massacring them without mercy. Bonnebault spoke—

"There was this sort of trouble round about Toulouse when I was stationed there," said he. "We marched out, the peasants were cut down and arrested.—It was a joke to see them trying to make a stand against regular troops. Ten of them were sent off to the hulks afterward and eleven more went to jail, and it all came to nothing, ay! A soldier is a soldier, and has a right to cut you civilians down, gee whoa!—"

"What is the matter with you all," asked Tonsard; "you are as scared as wild goats?—Perhaps they will catch my mother or my girls with something, will they? Some one is going to be locked up, eh?—Well, then, they will go to jail. The Upholsterer will not put the whole neighborhood in jail. And if he does, the King will feed them better than they feed themselves; and they warm the cells in winter."

"You are simpletons!" bellowed old Fourchon. "It is better to lie low, it is, than to fly in the man's face. If you do, you will be paid out for it. If you like the hulks—that is another thing! The work is not so hard there as it is in the fields, it is true, but you have not your liberty."

"Perhaps, after all," began Vaudoyer, who was one of the boldest in counsel, "it would be better that one of us should risk his skin to rid the country of the Beast of Gévaudan, that has his lair by the Avonne gate—"

"Settle Michaud!" said Nicolas. "That is what I think."

"Things are not ripe yet," said Fourchon, "we should lose too much, children. What we ought to do is to make a poor mouth, and cry out that we are starving; the master and his wife up at the Aigues will be for helping us, and you will make more that way than by the gleaning."

"You are a chuckle-headed lot," shouted Tonsard. "Suppose that there is a racket with the police and the soldiers, they will not clap a whole countryside in irons, and there are the old *seigneurs*, and the folks at Ville-aux-Fayes; they are well disposed to back us up."

"That is true," said Courtecuisse. "Nobody complains except the Upholsterer. M. de Soulanges and M. de Ronquerolles and the rest are content! When one thinks that, if that cuirassier had been man enough to be killed with the rest of them, I should be snug at my Avonne gate at this day, and that he has turned me topsy-turvy till I don't know whether I am on my head or my heels—"

"They will not call the soldiers out for a beggarly bourgeois who is at loggerheads with the whole neighborhood round," said Godain. "It is his own fault. He must needs upset everything and everybody here; Government will tell him to go and hang himself."

"That is just what Government will say; Government can't help itself—poor Government!" said Fourchon, smitten with a sudden tenderness for the Government. "I am sorry for Government; 'tis a good Government. It is hard up and has not a sou, like us—which is a stupid thing for a Government when it coins the money itself.—Ah! if I were Government—"

"But they told me over at Ville-aux-Fayes that M. de Ronquerolles had said something in the Assembly about our rights," cried Courtecuisse.

"Yes, I saw that in M'sieu Rigou's paper," said Vaudoyer, who could read and write, in his quality of ex-policeman.

In spite of his maudlin tenderness, old Fourchon had

been following the discussion, as well as the by-play which made it interesting, with close and intelligent attention. Suddenly he contrived to get on his feet and take up his position in the midst of the tavern.

"Listen to the old one, he is tipsy," said Tonsard; "he has twice as much mischief in him, his own and the wine—"

"Spanish wine! that makes three!" broke in Fourchon, laughing like a satyr. "Children, you must not take the bull by the horns, you are not strong enough; take him in flank!—Sham dead, lie like sleeping dogs! The little woman has had a good frightening by now; things will not go on like this much longer, you will see. Her will leave the place and if her goes the Upholsterer will go too, for he dotes upon her. That is the way to do it. But to hurry them away, I advise you to take their councillor from them, their stronghold, our spy, our *ape*."

"Who is that?"

"Eh! why, 'tis the cursed cure!" said Tonsard, "he that rakes up sins and would like to feed us on holy wafers."

"Right you are!" cried Vaudoyer, "we did very well without the cure. Something ought to be done to rid us of the wafer-eater. He is the common enemy."

"The whipper-snapper," said Fourchon (this was a nickname given to the cure on account of his shabby appearance), "may fall into the hands of some sly hussy, for he keeps every fast day. Then if he were caught on the spree there would be a fine hubbub, and his bishop would have to send him somewhere else. Old Rigou, good soul, would be mightily pleased. If Courtecuisse's girl would leave her place at Auxerre, she is so pretty that if she turned pious she would save the country. Ta, ran, tan ti!"

"And why should it not be *you?*" whispered Godain to Catherine. "There would be a basketful of crowns to be made out of it for hush-money, and you would be mistress here at once."

"Are we going to glean or are we not?" cried Bonne-

bault. "Much I care for your Abbe. I am from Conches, and we have no parson there to harrow our consciences with his gab."

"Wait a bit," opined Vaudoyer. "Some one ought to go to old Rigou (he knows the law) and ask him if the Upholsterer can stop our gleaning. He will tell us if we are in the right. If the Upholsterer is within the law, then we will see about taking him in flank, as the old one says."

"There will be blood shed," said Nicolas, rising to his feet (he had finished off the bottle of wine which Catherine had set before him to keep him quiet). "If you will listen to me some one will bring down Michaud; but you are a sappy lot of dawdlers!"

"Not me!" said Bonnebault. "If you are the friends to keep mum about it, I will undertake to bring down the Upholsterer myself! What fun to lodge a bullet in his bread-basket! I should have my revenge on all my stuck-up officers."

"There, there!" cried Jean-Louis Tonsard, who had come in since old Fourchon entered. Some said that Gaubertin was Jean-Louis's father. The young fellow had succeeded to Tonsard's occupation of clipping hedges and arbors and the like offices. He went to well-to-do houses, chatted with masters and servants, and by dint of picking up ideas in this way he became the man of resource and most knowing member of the family. For the last few months Jean-Louis had paid court to Rigou's pretty servant girl, and in this matter, as will very shortly be seen, he justified the high opinion entertained of his shrewdness.

"Well, prophet, what is the matter?" asked his parent.

"You are playing the bourgeois' game, I tell you," said Jean-Louis. "Frighten the gentry at the Aigues so as to maintain your rights, well and good; but as for driving them out of the place and having the Aigues put up for auction that is what the bourgeois want in the valley, but it is not to our interest to do it. If you help to divide up the big estates, where are the National lands to come from in the

revolution that's coming? You will get the land for nothing then, just as old Rigou did; but once let the bourgeois chew up the land, they will spit it out in much smaller and dearer bits. You will work for them, like all the others who are working for Rigou. Look at Courtecuisse!"

The policy set forth in this harangue was too profound for wine-flustered wits. Every one present, Courtecuisse excepted, was putting money by. Every one meant to have his share of the loaf of the Aigues. So they allowed Jean-Louis to talk on, and kept up private conversations among themselves, after the manner of the Chamber of Deputies.

"Well, now, you hear that! You will be Rigou's cat's-paws," cried Fourchon, the only one who caught the drift of the speech made by his grandson.

Just at that moment Langlumé, the miller from the Aigues, happened to pass. La Tonsard hailed him.

"So it is true, is it, that they are going to stop the gleaning, Mister Deputy Mayor?"

Langlume, a jovial-looking little man with a floury countenance and whitish-gray suit of clothes, came up the steps, and immediately every peasant looked serious.

"Lord, boys, yes and no. The really poor will glean; but the steps that will be taken will be greatly to your interests—"

"How so?" inquired Godain.

"Why, if they prevent all the poor folk from pouring in on us," said the miller, with a shrewd Norman's wink, "that will not hinder the rest of you from going to glean elsewhere; unless all the mayors copy the mayor of Blangy."

"So, it is true?" asked Tonsard, with menace in his looks.

"For my own part," said Bonnebault, as he tilted his foraging cap over one ear and twirled his hazel switch till it whistled about him; "I am going back to Conches to give warning to friends there." And with that the Lovelace of the valley went out, whistling the tune of the martial ditty—

"You know the Hussars of the Guard,
And you don't know the Trombone in the Band?"

"I say, Marie!" the old grandmother called, "your sweetheart is going a droll way round to Conches."

Marie sprang to the door. "He is going to see Aglaé!" she cried. "That goose of a girl yonder wants a good basting, once for all."

"Here, Vaudoyer," said Tonsard, "just go and see old Rigou. Then we shall know what to be at. He is our oracle; what he spouts out costs nothing."

"Here is another piece of folly," exclaimed Jean-Louis under his breath. "He does nothing for nothing. Annette spoke truth; he is a worse counsellor than anger."

"I recommend you to be careful," added Langlume, "for the General went to the prefecture about your misdoings, and Sibilet said that he vowed on his honor that he would go to Paris if need was, to speak with the Chancellor of France, the King, and the whole shop, but he would have the law of his peasants."

"*His* peasants!"

"Oh, indeed! then perhaps we are not our own masters now?" asked Tonsard.

At this inquiry, Vaudoyer went in search of the ex-mayor, and Langlume, who had already gone out, returned a step or two, and called back, "You pack of do-nothings! have you incomes of your own that you have a mind to be your own masters?"

The words were spoken in jest, but the profound truth in them was felt something in the way that a horse feels a flick of the lash.

"Tra, la la! you masters!—I say, sonny, after what you did this morning you are more like to play a tune on the rifle than to have my clarionet in your fingers."

"Don't you worry him; he is just the one to make you bring up your wine by punching your stomach," said Catherine, turning savagely on her grandfather.

XIII

THE PEASANTS' MONEY-LENDER

STRATEGICALLY speaking, Rigou at Blangy was a sentinel at an outpost in time of war. He kept watch over the Aigues, and thoroughly he did his work! No police spy is comparable with an amateur detective in the service of hate.

When the General first came to the Aigues, Rigou must have had his own ideas concerning the newcomer, and plans, which came to nothing on Montcornet's marriage with a Troisville; at first he appeared to be well-disposed toward the great landowner. He had shown his intentions so plainly that Gaubertin judged it expedient to offer him a share of the spoil so as to involve him in the conspiracy against the Aigues. But before Rigou committed himself and accepted the part for which he was cast, he meant to force the General "to show his hand," as he put it.

One day after the Countess was installed, a tiny green-painted basket-chaise drove up to the main entrance of the Aigues. In it sat his worship the mayor, with the mayoress at his side. The pair stepped out of it and ascended the flight of steps on the terrace. But the Countess was a devoted partisan of the bishop, the clerical party, and the Abbe Brossette; and François reported that "her ladyship was not at home." The piece of impertinence, which might have been expected of a woman born in Russia, brought a yellow flush to the Benedictine's visage.

If the lady had felt any curiosity to see the man of whom the cure had said "that he was a soul in hell who plunged into sin as into a bath to refresh himself," she might perhaps

have avoided that blunder. She would have been careful not to arouse in the mayor that cold-blooded hatred which Liberals bore Royalists, a hatred that could not fail to increase, when the near neighborhood kept the memory of a mortification ever fresh.

A few explanatory details concerning this man will have the double advantage of throwing light on Rigou's share of the "big business," as his two partners called it, and of portraying, at the same time, an extremely curious type. It is a rural product peculiar to France, and undiscovered as yet by any pencil. And more than this: every single detail is of immense importance considered in its bearing on the history of this valley; Rigou's house, his fashion of blowing his fire, his habits at table, his opinions and way of life—none of these things are insignificant from this point of view. In fact, the renegade illustrates in person democracy in theory and practice; he is its alpha and omega and *summum*.

Possibly you may remember the portraits of other Masters of Avarice, painted in preceding *Scènes*. The Provincial Miser, first and foremost—Goodman Grandet of Saumur, whose avarice was as much a part of his nature as the tiger's thirst for blood; next follows old Gobseck the bill-discounter, the Jesuit of Gold—for him the relish of money lay in the sense of power over others which it gave him, tears for him were as wine, and he was a connoisseur; then comes the Baron de Nucingen, who raised commercial cheating to the height of statecraft; and lastly, surely you recollect a study of the household miser—old Hochon of Issoudun—or that other, grown avaricious through family ambition, little La Baudraye of Sancerre?

And yet, so diverse are the shades of the same human affections, so different the color they take up in passing through each human medium, and this is so especially the case with avarice, that there is another distinct type still left on the dissecting slab of the amphitheatre of the study of contemporary human nature. Rigou was Rigou the Selfish Miser, or, to be more precise, a miser full of tender cares for

his own comfort, but hard and indifferent where others were concerned. He was, to be brief, the ecclesiastical miser, the monk who remained a monk so long as he could squeeze the juice of the lemon called Good Living, and took the secular habit the better to dip in the public purse. Let us begin by explaining how he had come to lead a life of unbroken ease and comfort under his own roof.

Blangy, to wit the cluster of some sixty houses described in Blondet's letter to Nathan, stands on rising ground on the left bank of the Thune. Each house is surrounded by its own garden, and in consequence Blangy is an extremely pretty village. Some few of the houses are down by the waterside, at the very top of the knoll stands the village church, and beside it the house that used to be the parsonage, the churchyard lying round about the apse end, after the country fashion.

Rigou took the opportunity of laying his sacrilegious hands on the parsonage-house, built in bygone days by that good Catholic, Mlle. Choin, on a bit of ground bought by her for the purpose. The church was only separated from the parsonage by the width of a terraced garden, whence there was a view over the lands of Blangy, Soulanges, and Cerneux; for the house stood between the parks of the two manors. A field lay on the side furthest from the church, a bit of land purchased by the previous cure a short time before his death. Rigou, by nature suspicious, had put up a wall about it.

As in due time the mayor declined to give up the parsonage-house for the purposes for which it was intended, the commune was obliged to buy a cottage for the cure near the church, and to lay out five thousand francs in setting it in order, enlarging it, and adding a bit of garden to it under the wall of the sacristy, so that there might be direct communication as heretofore between the cure's house and the church.

Both houses, therefore, being built on the alignment of the church, with which their gardens apparently connected

them, looked out upon a square space, which might be considered as the market-place of Blangy, and this more particularly of late years, since the Count had built a communal hall, which served as a mayor's office, just opposite the cure's house, and had lodged the rural policeman in it. Furthermore, he had erected a schoolhouse for the brothers of the *Doctrine chrétienne*, for which the Abbe Brossette had formerly pleaded in vain. The sometime Benedictine's house and the parsonage where the young cure lived, being both contiguous to the church, were as much united as separated by the edifice, and furthermore, they overlooked each other, and consequently the whole village knew all that went on in the Abbe Brossette's household.

The village street wound uphill from the Thune to the church, and the Knoll of Blangy was crowned by strips of vineyard and peasants' gardens and a patch of copse.

Rigou's house was the best in the village; it was built of the large flints peculiar to Burgundy, laid in yellowish mortar smoothed out in squares the size of the width of the trowel, which produced a series of wavy lines with a flint surface, usually black, protruding here and there from the mortar. Bands of yellow mortar unspotted by flints did duty for stone facings round the windows, the surface (in course of time) being covered with fine meandering cracks, such as you behold in old ceilings. The clumsy outside shutters were conspicuous by reason of thick coats of dragon-green paint. Scales of lichen concealed the joints of the slates on the roof. It was a typical Burgundian house, such as the traveller may see by thousands as he crosses this part of France.

The house door opened upon a corridor, in the middle of which the wooden staircase rose. As soon as you entered you saw the door of a large sitting-room lighted by three windows, which looked out into the square. The kitchen, contrived underneath the staircase, looked into a yard neatly paved with cobble-stones, with a large double-leaved gate on the side of the street. So much for the ground floor.

There were three rooms on the first story, and a little attic filled the space in the roof above.

Outside, in the yard, a woodshed, stable and coach-house occupied the side at right angles to the house; and on a floor above the rickety erection there was a fruit-loft and a servant's bedroom. Opposite the house stood the cowshed and the pigsties.

The garden was about an acre in extent and inclosed by walls. It was a cure's garden, full of espaliers, fruit-trees, and trellis vines, and sanded garden walks with pyramid fruit-trees on either side, and squares of pot-herbs manured with stable litter. The croft above the house had also been planted with trees and inclosed within walls; it was a space large enough to keep a couple of cows all the year round.

Inside the house the sitting-room was wainscoted to elbow height and hung with old tapestry. The furniture of walnut wood, brown with age, and covered with needlework, was in keeping with the old-fashioned rooms and ceiling. The three main beams were visible and painted, but the intervening spaces were plastered. Above the walnut-wood chimney-piece stood a grotesque mirror, its sole ornament, with the exception of two brass eggs mounted on marble pedestals. These objects split in half; you turned back the upper part on its hinge and it did duty as a candle-sconce. This kind of convertible candlestick, with its little ornamental chains, is an invention of the days of Louis XV., and is beginning to grow scarce.

On a green and gold bracket set in the wall opposite the windows stood a clock, an excellent time-keeper in spite of its cheap case. The curtains, suspended from rings on an iron curtain-rod, were fifty years old at least, and made of a cotton material, of a checked pattern, very similar to the cottons printed in pink and white squares that used to come from the Indies. A sideboard and a table completed the list of furniture, which was kept spotlessly clean.

By the hearth stood a huge easy-chair, dedicated to Rigou's sole use; and in the corner above the low what-

not, which he used as a desk, hung a pair of bellows from a brass-headed nail of the commonest kind. To that pair of bellows Rigou owed his prosperity.

From this bald description, which rivals an auctioneer's sale-catalogue for brevity, the reader might easily be led to imagine that the furniture of M. and Mme. Rigou's respective chambers was limited to strict necessaries, which would be a delusion. Rigou's parsimony was not of the kind that denies itself any material comfort. Wherefore the most fastidious fine lady could have slept luxuriously in the bed made for Rigou; the mattresses were of the best, the sheets fine and soft, the down bed had once been the gift of some devout woman to a reverend churchman. Ample curtains shut out cold draughts. And, as will be seen, it was the same with everything else.

At the outset the miser had reduced his wife, who could neither read, write, nor cipher, to slavish obedience. She, poor creature, had ruled her late master, only to become her husband's servant and drudge. She cooked and washed for him with little or no help from the young person named Annette, a very handsome girl of nineteen, as much a slave to Rigou as her mistress, with thirty francs a year for her wage.

Mme. Rigou was tall, gaunt, and wizened-looking; all the red in her sallow face was gathered on the cheek-bones; her head was always tied up in a handkerchief, and she wore the same skirt all the year round. She did not pass a couple of hours out of her house in a month, and spent her consuming energy on household work, in a way which only the most zealous domestic could or would have done. It would have puzzled the keenest observer to discover in the woman a trace of the splendid figure, the fresh Rubens coloring, the full-blown comeliness, the superb teeth, the maiden glances that first attracted Cure Niseron's attention to the girl. A single confinement (she had one daughter, Mme. Soudry, junior) had decimated her teeth, bleared her eyes, and withered her complexion; her eyelashes had fallen out. It seemed as if the hand of God had been heavy on the priest's wife.

Yet, like every well-to-do farmer's wife, she loved to look through her stores of silk, in the piece and unworn dresses.

Her drawers were full of laces and trinkets, which only caused Rigou's young servant-girls to commit the sin of envy, and to wish her death; her finery had never served any other purpose. She was one of those half-animal creatures who are born to live instinctively. As the once lovely Arsène had been no schemer, the late Niseron's disposition of his property would be an insoluble mystery but for the clew. An odd circumstance had inspired him with the notion of disinheriting his kin. The story ought to be told for the benefit of that vast proportion of mankind who have expectations.

There had been a time when Mme. Niseron, the Republican's wife, had overwhelmed her husband's uncle with attentions, for there was an imminent prospect of succeeding to the property of an old man of seventy-two, and some forty and odd thousand francs would be enough to keep the family of his only relation and heir-at-law in very tolerable comfort. The late Mme. Niseron was somewhat impatiently expecting this desirable increase of fortune, for, besides her son, she was the happy mother of a sweet little girl, a mischievous, innocent child. Perhaps it is because such children are doomed to die in childhood, that in their childhood they are so complete, for the little one died at fourteen of "pale color," as chlorosis is popularly called. She was the will-o'-the-wisp of the parsonage, and as much at home in her great-uncle's house as in her own. She had it all her own way there. She was fond of Mademoiselle Arsène, the handsome servant-maid whom the cure took into his house in 1789. Revolutionary storms had even then relaxed ecclesiastical discipline. Hitherto he had had an elderly housekeeper, but old Mlle. Pichard felt that she was failing, and sent her niece Arsène, thinking, no doubt, to hand over her rights to that comely damsel.

In 1791, soon after the old cure offered an asylum to Dom Rigou and Frère Jean, little Genevieve took it into her head

to play a very innocent childish prank. One day at the parsonage Arsene and several children were playing at the game in which each child in turn hides some object which the others try to find, and calls out, "Burning!" or "Freezing!" as the seekers are nearer or further from the object. Little Genevieve, seized with a sudden whim, hid the bellows in Arsene's bed. The bellows could not be found, the children gave up the game, Genevieve's mother came to bring her home, and the child quite forgot to hang the bellows from the nail again.

For a whole week Arsene and her aunt looked for the bellows, then they too "gave it up"; it is possible to live without a pair of bellows, the old cure blew up his fire with an old ear-trumpet, made in times when everybody had one, which proves beyond a doubt that the cure's ear-trumpet had belonged to some courtier of the time of Henri III. But at length, about a month before the aunt died, the Abbe Mouchon, the cure from Soulanges and the whole Niseron family came to dinner at the parsonage, and the housekeeper broke out into renewed Jeremiads over the bellows which had so mysteriously disappeared.

"Eh!" cried little Genevieve Niseron, bursting out laughing. "Why, I hid them in Arsene's bed a fortnight ago; if she had made her bed, the great lazy thing, she would have found them."

In 1791 every one was free to laugh; but the deepest silence followed the laughter.

"There is nothing to laugh at," said the old housekeeper; "Arsene has been sitting up with me since my illness began."

In spite of this explanation, the cure of Blangy looked daggers at Mme. Niseron and her husband, such a look as a priest can give when he thinks that a trap has been laid for him.

Then the housekeeper died, and Dom Rigou managed to exasperate the Abbe Niseron against his nephew to such purpose that François Niseron was disinherited by a will made in Arsene Pichard's favor.

All this had happened long ago, but in 1823 grateful sentiment still led Rigou to blow the fire with the ear-trumpet, and the pair of bellows still hung from the nail.

Mme. Niseron doted on her little girl, and when the child died in 1794 the mother followed her within the year. When the cure died, Citizen Rigou took the burden of Arsene's concerns upon himself by taking her to wife. The sometime lay-brother from the abbey attached himself to Rigou as a dog does to a master, and in his own person combined the offices of groom, dairyman, gardener, body-servant, and steward to this sensual Harpagon.

Rigou's daughter Arsene was married (without a portion) to the public prosecutor, Soudry, junior; she inherited some share of her mother's good looks, together with her father's cunning.

Rigou had reached the age of sixty-seven. For thirty years he had not known illness; nothing seemed to shake health that might well be called insolent. He was tall and spare. There were brownish circles about his eyes, and the eyelids were almost black. In the morning, when he exhibited a red, wrinkled, morocco-grained throat, his resemblance to a condor was but the more strikingly complete by reason of a nose of sanguine hue, immensely long, and very sharp at the tip. He was almost bald, the curious conformation of the back of his head would have alarmed any one who understood its significance; for that long ridge-shaped prominence indicates a despotic will. The grayish eyes, half veiled by membranous webs of eyelids, were made to play a hypocrite's part. Two locks of hair, of no particular color, and so scanty that they failed to hide the skin beneath, hung about the large, pointed, rimless ears: a noticeable defect this last, for it is a certain sign of cruelty—that is, a love of inflicting mental (not physical) pain—when it does not indicate mental unsoundness. An exaggeratedly wide mouth and thin lips betrayed their owner for an undaunted trencherman and a valiant drinker by a certain droop at the corners, where two comma-shaped slits slobbered perpetually

while he ate or talked. Heliogabalus must have looked like that.

His dress never varied. He always wore a long blue overcoat with a military collar, a black stock, a pair of trousers and a roomy waistcoat of black cloth. He had hobnails put in the heavy soles of his walking shoes, and in cold weather he wore additional soles, knitted by his wife in winter evenings. Annette and her mistress also knitted their master's socks.

Rigou's baptismal name was Grégoire, a circumstance which suggested puns that his circle of acquaintance still found irresistibly amusing, in spite of thirty years of hard wear. He was usually saluted as "Grig" or "Rigadoon," or (and most frequently of all) as *Grigou* (G. Rigou)—curmudgeon.

Want of opposition and absence of any public opinion had favored the old Benedictine's favorite pursuits. No one would imagine from the brief outline sketch of his character how far he had advanced in the science of selfishness, of material comfort, and sensual enjoyment of every kind. In the first place, he took his meals apart. His wife and Annette waited upon him, and then sat down to table in the kitchen with Frere Jean while the master of the house digested his meal, slept off his wine, and read the paper.

In the country no periodical is known by a specific name; it is always spoken of as "the paper."

Dinner, breakfast, and supper were alike composed of dishes exquisitely prepared with the culinary skill in which a cure's housekeeper excels the rest of her sisterhood. Mme. Rigou herself, for instance, churned twice a week. Cream entered into every sauce. Vegetables, gathered at the last moment, were transferred as it were straight from the garden into the pot. Parisians are so accustomed to garden stuff which has lain sweltering in a shop exposed to the genial influences of the sun, the tainted air of city streets, and the greengrocer's watering-can, all promotive of a specious freshness, that they have no idea of the delicate, fugitive

flavors of vegetable products when eaten in some sort "alive."

The Soulanges butcher supplied his best meat, under penalty of losing the redoubtable Rigou's custom. The poultry were reared at the house, to insure superlative excellence.

A kind of hypocritical care was likewise expended on everything that conduced to Rigou's comfort. The deeply-versed Thelemist might wear slippers of coarse-looking leather, but within they were lined with the softest lamb's-wool. His coat might be rough and coarse, for it never touched his skin, but his shirts (always washed at home) were of the finest Frisian lawn. The wine of the country was good enough for his wife, Annette, and Frere Jean—Rigou kept some of his own vintage for this purpose—but his own private cellar was stocked like a Fleming's; the noblest wines of Burgundy were tightly packed among wines from the Rhone, and Bordeaux, Champagne, and Roussillon, and Spain. All these were purchased ten years in advance, and bottled by Frere Jean. The liqueurs from the Indies bore the name of Mme. Amphoux; the money-lender had laid in sufficient of these from the wreckage of a Burgundian chateau to last him the term of his natural life.

Rigou ate and drank like Louis XIV., one of the largest consumers on record; the wear and tear of a life more than voluptuous betrayed itself in this constant demand for repairs. Yet while he denied himself nothing, he was a keen and hard bargain-driver; he would haggle over every trifle as only a churchman can haggle. He did not trouble himself overmuch, shrewd monk that he was, with precautions against cheating; he provided himself with a sample beforehand, and had the agreement made out in writing, but when the wine or the provisions were despatched he gave the senders notice that if the bulk did not correspond in every way with the sample he should refuse delivery.

Frère Jean, who looked after the fruit, had set himself to acquire the art of keeping the finest "orchard stuff" in the

department through the winter. Rigou had pears and apples, and occasionally grapes, at Easter.

Never was prophet on the borderland of deity more blindly obeyed than Rigou in every smallest whim. At a twitch of those heavy eyelids, his wife, Annette, and Frère Jean quaked for mortal fear, and of the very multiplicity of his demands he forged the chains that bound his three slaves. At every moment of their lives those hapless creatures felt conscious that they were watched, that they were under an overseer's lash; and at length they had come to take a kind of pleasure in the incessant round of toil; they were too hard-worked to feel bored, and this man's comfort was the one all-absorbing thought that filled their lives.

Annette was the tenth in a succession of comely maid-servants since the year 1795. Rigou hoped and meant that similar relays should mark his passage to the tomb. Annette was sixteen years old when she came; at the age of nineteen she must go. Every one of these damsels, chosen from Auxerre, Clamecy and the Morvan with fastidious care, had been beguiled by bright prospects. But Mme. Rigou clung obstinately to life, and invariably when the three years were out some squabble brought about by the girl's insolence to her unhappy mistress made it imperatively necessary to part with her. Annette was a masterpiece of delicate beauty, bright and piquant, worthy to wear a ducal coronet. She was a clever girl moreover. Rigou knew nothing of the understanding between Annette and Jean-Louis Tonsard, which proves that he was smitten with the one pretty damsel to whom ambition had suggested the idea of flattering the lynx by way of throwing dust in his eyes.

The uncrowned Louis XV. on his side was not wholly faithful to the pretty Annette. The peasants borrow to buy land beyond their means; Rigou held oppressive mortgages on these properties, and the result of it was that he made a harem of the whole valley from Soulanges to a distance of fifteen leagues beyond Conches in the direction of Brie, and

this at no cost to himself. He needed only to grant stay of proceedings as the price of the fleeting pleasures on which age often wastes its substance.

This sybarite's life, therefore, cost him almost nothing, and Bouret himself could scarce have surpassed it. Rigou's white slaves cut his hay and gathered his harvests, and brought and stacked his firewood. A peasant thinks little of giving his labor, especially if he can put off the evil day of payment of interest in that way; and though Rigou always demanded small money payments as well for a few months' grace, he squeezed some manual service out of his debtors into the bargain. They submitted to this forced labor, this *corvée* in all but name, and thought that it cost them nothing because they had not to put their hands into their pockets. It sometimes happened that a peasant paid more than the original sum as interest on the capital loaned.

Deep as a monk, silent as a Benedictine in travail of his chronicle, astute as a priest, shifty as every miser is bound to be, yet always keeping on the windward side of the law, Rigou might have made a Tiberius in ancient Rome, a Richelieu in the days of Louis XIII., or a Fouche if he had had ambition enough to assist the Convention; but in his wisdom he chose to be a Lucullus in private life, a miser-sensualist. Hatred gave zest to this occupation of harassing the Count; he had every means of doing it thoroughly, and it found him mental employment. He could move the peasants at his will by secret wires, and he enjoyed the game that he played. It was like a living chess-tournament, all the pawns were alive; knights rode about on horseback, bishops babbled like old Fourchon, the towers of a feudal castle glittered in the sun, and the queen was maliciously giving check to the king.

Every day as Rigou rose he looked out of his window at the stately roof of the Aigues; he could see the smoke rising from the lodges by those lordly gateways, and to himself he would mutter, "All this shall be pulled down, I will dry up the streams, and cut down the shady forest." And while he hunted his large quarry he had a more insignificant

prey. The château was to fall, but the renegade flattered himself that he would murder the Abbe Brossette by pin-pricks.

It is only necessary to add, by way of a final touch to the portrait, that the sometime monk made a practice of going to mass, regretting that his wife continued to live, and manifesting a desire to be reconciled with the Church so soon as he should be a widower. He greeted the Abbe Brossette deferentially when they met, speaking suavely, never allowing his temper to get the better of him. Indeed, generally speaking, every man who has been connected with the Church appears to possess the long-suffering of an insect. To her discipline her servants owe a sense of decorum which has been signally lacking among the Frenchmen of the last twenty years, and which those who look upon themselves as well-bred men do not always possess. When the Revolution shook ecclesiastics out of their convents and threw them upon the world, the children of the Church gave proof of their superior training by a coolness and reticence which never forsook them even in apostasy.

That little matter of the will in 1792 had opened Gaubertin's eyes to the depths of guile concealed by that face, with its taint of guileful hypocrisy, and from that time forth he made a confidant of the fellow-worshipper of the Golden Calf. When the firm of Leclercq was founded he gave Rigou a hint to invest fifty thousand francs in the venture and guaranteed the undertaking. Rigou became a sleeping partner of so much the more consequence because he left his money at compound interest. At the present time his interest in the house amounted to a hundred thousand francs, although in 1816 he had drawn out about eighty thousand to put into the funds, an investment which brought him in seventeen thousand francs per annum. Lupin knew of his own knowledge that Rigou had at least a hundred and fifty thousand francs lent out in mortgages for small amounts on large bits of property. Ostensibly the money-lender derived a net income of fourteen thousand francs or there-

about from land. Altogether, it was pretty plain that Rigou's income must amount to something like forty thousand francs, but his capital was an unknown x, a fourth term in a proportion sum which baffled arithmetic, and the devil alone knew the ins and outs of the jobbery in which Rigou and Langlumé were concerned.

The terrible money-lender reckoned on another score of years of life, and had invented a set of hard and fast rules for his guidance in business. He never lent a farthing to a peasant unless the man was a purchaser of seven acres at the least, and had actually paid down one half of the purchase money. Clearly Rigou was well aware of the weak spot in our legislation with regard to the expropriation of small parcels of land, and of the danger to the Inland Revenue Department and the land-owning interest arising from the excessive sub-division of property. Where is the sense of suing a peasant for the value of a single furrow when the man has but five furrows altogether? The eyes of individual interest will always see twenty-five years ahead of the furthest vision of any legislative assembly. What a lesson for a nation! A law that is not a dead letter always springs from the mighty brain of a single man of genius, it is not made by laying nine hundred heads together; no matter how able the men may be taken apart, they dwarf each other in a crowd. After all, in Rigou's rule is there not the right principle? What better means have we of putting a stop to the present state of things, when land-owning is reduced to an absurdity and a square yard of soil is divided into halves and thirds, and quarters and tenths, as in the commune of Argenteuil, which numbers thirty thousand parcels of land?

Such reforms, however, demand co-operation as widespread as the arrangement which oppressed this arrondissement. As Rigou found Lupin about one-third of the total amount of legal business which he transacted, it was natural that the Soulanges notary should be Rigou's faithful ally. In this way the pirate could add the amount of illegal inter-

est *to the capital* in the bond, and if the borrower was a married man he was careful to make husband and wife jointly and severally responsible. The peasant, overjoyed to have but five per cent to pay, so long as the loan was undischarged, always hoped to rid himself of the debt by unsparing toil, and by high farming which raised the value of Rigou's security.

This is the real secret of the wonders worked by the "spade husbandry" that deludes superficial economists, a political blunder which sends French money into Germany to pay for horses. That animal is in process of extinction in France, while the grazing and breeding of horned cattle has fallen off to such an extent that butcher meat will soon be beyond the reach, not merely of the working population, but also of the class above them.[1]

So sweat poured for Rigou from many a brow between Conches and Ville-aux-Fayes, and Rigou was respected by everybody; while the General, who paid his workers well and was the one man who brought money into the country, was cursed for his pains and hated as the rich man is hated of the poor. Would such a state of things be comprehensible but for the foregoing bird's-eye view of Mediocracy?

Fourchon had spoken truth when he said that the bourgeois had taken the place of the seigneurs. Peasant-proprietors of the Courtecuisse type were the serfs of a modern Tiberius in the valley of Avonne, just as, in Paris, the manufacturer without capital must slave for the large capitalist's benefit.

Soudry followed Rigou's example. His area extended from Soulanges to Ville-aux-Fayes and five leagues beyond; the two money-lenders had divided the district between them.

Gaubertin's greed was on a grander scale. Not merely did he himself avoid competition with his associates, but he diverted the capital of Ville-aux-Fayes from these profitable local investments. The power exercised at elections by this

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[1] See Le Cure de Village.

triumvirate may be imagined when nearly every voter's fortunes depended upon his complacence.

Hatred, ability, and command of money—this was the formidable triangular array of the enemy intrenched by the Aigues, an enemy who watched all the General's movements, an enemy in constant communication with sixty to eighty small proprietors, each of whom had relatives or connections among the peasantry, who feared one and all of them as debtors fear a creditor.

Rigou was a Tonsard of a larger growth. Tonsard lived by plain theft. Rigou grew fat on legalized robbery. Both were fond of good living; both men were essentially of the same species, but the one was nature uncultivated, the other, nature submitted to the sharpening discipline of the cloister.

It was about four o'clock that afternoon when Vaudoyer left the Grand-I-Vert to ask counsel of the ex-mayor, and Rigou dined at four. Vaudoyer, finding the house door shut, peered in between the window-curtains.

"M. Rigou!" he called. "It is I—Vaudoyer."

Frère Jean came out of the yard gate in another moment, and bade him come in with him.

"Come into the garden," said he, "the master has company."

The "company" was none other than Sibilet, who had come under the pretext of arriving at an understanding with regard to Brunet's recent notice of judgment; but as a matter of fact the pair were discussing a very different matter. He had come in just as the usurer was finishing his dessert.

A dazzling white cloth was spread on the square table (Rigou insisted on clean table-linen every day, caring little for the trouble given to his wife and Annette), and the visitor beheld the arrival of a bowl heaped up with strawberries and apricots, peaches, figs, almonds, and all the fruits in season, served, almost as daintily as at the Aigues, upon green vine-leaves, laid on white porcelain plates.

While Sibilet came into the room, Rigou bade him bolt the double doors (an arrangement adapted to every room in the house, with the double object of keeping out draughts and deadening sounds). Then he inquired what urgent business had brought the steward in broad daylight, when it was so much simpler and safer to come after dark.

"It is this," said Sibilet. "Here is the Upholsterer talking of going to Paris to see the Keeper of the Seals. He is capable of doing you a lot of harm; he may ask to have your son-in-law displaced, or for a change of judges and president too at Ville-aux-Fayes, more particularly when he comes to read the notice of this new decision in your favor. He is in a towering rage. He is shrewd too, and the Abbe Brossette who advises him is one that can enter the lists against you and Gaubertin.—The priests are in power just now, and his lordship the bishop is very friendly with the Abbe Brossette. The Countess said something about speaking to her cousin (the Comte de Casteran) concerning Nicolas. Then Michaud is beginning to see how the land lies."

"You are afraid," said Rigou. The words were spoken quite blandly, but the glance that accompanied them was appalling; suspicion brought something like a gleam into the dull eyes. "Are you calculating whether it would pay you better to throw in your lot with M. le Comte de Montcornet?"

"I don't exactly see how I am to come honestly by four thousand francs every year to put by, as I have been doing these last five years," said Sibilet bluntly. "M. Gaubertin has promised me all sorts of fine things, but matters are coming to a head, there will certainly be a collision, and it is one thing to promise, and another to keep your promise after the battle is won."

"I will speak to him," said Rigou quietly, "and in the meantime this is what I should say if it were any business of mine.—'For the last five years you have been taking four thousand francs a year to M. Rigou, and he, worthy man, is paying you seven and a half per cent per annum. At

this present moment you have twenty-seven thousand francs standing to your credit, for the money has been accumulating at compound interest; but as there is a certain document under private seal extant, and M. Rigou has a duplicate copy, the steward of the Aigues will be dismissed on the day when the Abbe Brossette lays that document before the Upholsterer, more especially if an anonymous letter is sent beforehand to warn him that his steward is playing a double game. So you would do better to hunt with us, without asking for your bone in advance, and so much the more so since that M. Rigou is not legally bound to pay you either compound interest or seven and a half per cent on your money; and if you tried to recover, he would let you sue him and pay the money into court; and before you could touch your twenty thousand francs the matter would be spun out with delays till judgment was given in the court of Ville-aux-Fayes. If you behave yourself discreetly, when M. Rigou is owner of your house at the Aigues property, you might keep on there with thirty thousand francs of your own, and thirty thousand more which he might feel disposed to lend you; and that would be so much the better for you, because as soon as the Aigues is split up into little lots, the peasants will be down upon them like poverty upon the world.' That is what M. Gaubertin might say to you; but for my own part I have nothing to say, it is no business of mine.—Gaubertin and I have our grounds for complaint against this child of the people who beats his own father, and we are carrying out our own ideas. If Friend Gaubertin needs you, I myself have need of nobody, for every one is very much at my service. As to the Keeper of the Seals, 'tis an office that changes hands pretty often, while some of us are always here."

"At any rate, you have had warning," said Sibilet, feeling that he had been a consummate ass.

"Of what?" demanded Rigou, with artful subtlety.

"Of the Upholsterer's intentions," said the steward meekly; "he has gone to the prefecture in a towering rage."

"Let him go. If Montcornet and his like did not

wear out carriage wheels, what would become of the coach-builders?"

"I will bring you three thousand francs to-night at eleven o'clock," said Sibilet; "but you might help me on a little by making over one of your mortgages to me; one where the man is getting behindhand—one that might bring me one or two nice little bits of land—"

"There is Courtecuisse's mortgage. I want to handle him carefully, for he is the best shot in the department. If I transferred him to you, it would look as though the Upholsterer were harassing the rascal through you, and that would kill two birds with one stone. He would be ready for anything when he saw that he was sinking lower than old Fourchon. Courtecuisse is wearing his life out at the Bâchelerie; he has been putting in espaliers along the garden walls, and altogether the place has improved very much. The little farm is worth four thousand francs; the Count would give you that much for the three acres of land behind his stables. If Courtecuisse were not a gormandizing rogue, he would have paid the interest with the game killed there."

"Very well. Transfer the mortgage to me; it will put butter on my bread. I shall have the house and garden for nothing, and the Count will buy the three acres."

"What am I to have?"

"Good Lord! you would draw blood from a stone!" cried Sibilet. "And here have I just got an order out of the Upholsterer to set the law in motion to regulate the gleaning."

"You have gained that point, have you, my lad?" asked Rigou, who had himself suggested the idea to Sibilet a few days previously, and recommended him to pass it on in the shape of advice to the General. "We have him now! It is all over with him! But it is not enough simply to have a hold on him; he must be twisted up like a quid of tobacco. Just draw the bolts, my lad, and tell my wife to bring in coffee and liqueurs for me, and tell Jean to put the horse in. I am going over to Soulanges. See you again in the even-

ing!—Good-day, Vaudoyer," the ex-mayor beheld his former rural policeman. "Well, what is it?"

Vaudoyer gave a full account of the day's events at the Grand-I-Vert, and ended by asking Rigou whether the General had the law on his side.

"He has a right to do so," said Rigou decisively. "We have a hard lord of the manor, and the Abbe Brossette is a shrewd fellow. Your cure put these notions into his head, because you don't go to mass, you pack of heretics! *I* am careful to go myself. There is a God, you see!—You will have to drink to the dregs, the Upholsterer will always be beforehand with you—"

"Very good. We will glean," said Vaudoyer, in the dogged tone of a Burgundian.

"Without a pauper's certificate?" queried the usurer. "They say that he has gone to the prefecture to ask for the soldiers so as to make you return to your duty—"

"We will glean as we have done in the past," Vaudoyer repeated.

"Glean! M. Sarcus will see if you are right," said the money-lender, and his manner seemed to promise that the justice of the peace would protect the gleaners.

"We will glean, and we shall be there in force—or Burgundy will no longer be Burgundy," said Vaudoyer. "If the gendarmes have swords, we have scythes, and we shall see!"

At half-past four the great green-painted yard-gates of the old parsonage turned on their hinges, Frere Jean appeared leading the bay horse by the bridle, and the chaise turned out into the square. Mme. Rigou and Annette stood on the step in front of the house door watching the little green basket-chaise and the master ensconced on the snug cushions under the leather hood.

"Don't stay out late, sir," said Annette, with a little pout of the lips.

By this time all the village had heard of the mayor's threatened proclamation, and the folk came to their doors,

or stopped short in the main street, to watch Rigou pass. They thought that he was going to Soulanges to defend their rights.

"Well, well, Mme. Courtecuisse, our old mayor will be going to take our part, no doubt," said an old woman with a spindle in her hands; she was deeply interested in the question of forest rights, for her husband sold the stolen fagots in Soulanges.

"Dear me! yes; it makes his heart bleed to see such things going on, he is as sorry about it as any of you," answered Courtecuisse's wife. Poor woman, she quaked at the bare mention of the money-lender's name, and praised him from sheer fear and trembling.

"Ah! I don't want to make too much of it; but he has been badly treated, he has!—Good-day, M. Rigou," said the old woman as she span, for Rigou gave a greeting to her as well as to his creditor's wife.

The money-lender crossed the Thune (never impassable in the worst of weather), and Tonsard, stirring abroad, spoke to Rigou on the road. "Well, Father Rigou, so the Upholsterer means to make slaves of us, does he?"

"We shall see about that," returned Rigou, touching up his horse.

"He will find a way of defending us, he will!" said Tonsard to a group of women and children who had gathered about him.

"Oh! he has you in mind; an innkeeper has his gudgeons in mind as he cleans his frying-pan," remarked Fourchon.

"You just keep your clapper quiet when you are drunk," said Mouche, with a tug at his grandfather's blouse, which sent the old man over on to the mound at the foot of a poplar. "If the rascally monk heard what you said, he would not give so much for your words—"

As a matter of fact, the real cause of Rigou's hasty visit to Soulanges was the weighty news which Sibilet had brought, news that seemed to threaten the secret coalition among the bourgeoisie of the Avonne valley.

BOOK TWO

I

THE BEST SOCIETY OF SOULANGES

SIX KILOMETRES from Blangy, "be the same more or less" (to borrow the legal formula), and at a like distance from Ville-aux-Fayes, the little town of Soulanges rises amphitheatre-fashion up a hillside, a spur of the long *côte* which runs parallel to the other ridge above the Avonne. Soulanges the Picturesque, as they call it, has a better claim to the title than Mantes itself.

Under this long low hill the Thune widens out over a bed of clay into a sheet of water some thirty acres in extent, with all the mills of Soulanges dotted over the little cluster of islands at the end, composing a picture as charming as any that the landscape gardener's art can devise. Further yet the Thune feeds all the rivers and artificial water in Soulanges park, and flows at last through a stately channel to join the Avonne.

Opposite the town stands the chateau of Soulanges, one of the finest manor houses in Burgundy, built in the reign of Louis XIV. from Mansard's designs. The local road winds between the town and the aforesaid sheet of water, vaingloriously dubbed "the Lake of Soulanges" by the townspeople.

The picturesqueness of the little place is Swiss rather than French in character; you shall scarcely find such another town in France. Blondet, it may be remembered, compared it in his letter to Swiss scenery, and in fact it reminds you of the charming outskirts of Neuchâtel, the gay vineyards that engirdle Soulanges heightening a resemblance which would be

complete but for the absence of Alps or Jura range. The streets rise one above another on the hillside; the houses stand apart in separate gardens, so that the general effect of the town is not the usual one of a crowd of dwellings packed together, but of masses of greenery and blue or red roofs among the flowers and trees, pleached alleys, and terraced walks, of many-colored detail blended into a picturesque whole.

In the Middle Ages the lords of Soulanges, in their munificence, built the church of stone, reserving for themselves a chapel in the choir and another chapel in the crypt for their family vault. A border of richly ornamented circles filled with small carved figures follows the outline of the great arch of the doorway (as at the church of Longjumeau), and a shaft terminating in a pinnacle stands in a niche on either side. Up above, in a triglyph, sits a sculptured Virgin with the Infant Saviour in her arms. It is a kind of doorway common enough among such little churches of that date as have had the luck to escape the ravages of the Calvinists. The outer walls of the aisles consist of five arches, outlined by moldings, and filled in with masonry pierced here and there by windows. The flying buttresses of the apse are worthy of a cathedral. The square-based belfry tower, built over one of the chancels, is a landmark in the countryside, for the church stands at the upper end of the great market-place at Soulanges, through which the road passes on its lowest side.

This market-place at Soulanges is a fair-sized open space surrounded by a collection of quaint-looking houses built about it at various times. A good few of them are built half of brick, half of timber, with a waistband of slates about their middles to protect the principal beams. These have stood there since the Middle Ages. Others, built of stone and adorned with balconies, display the gable beloved of our grandsires, which dates back as far as the twelfth century. Several attract your eyes by their quaint jutting beams covered with grotesque figures, which call up memories of

the times when every burgher was a merchant and lived above his shop. But most magnificent of all is the sculptured façade of the ancient mansion-house of the Bailiwick, standing in a line with the church, to which it furnishes a worthy companion-building. This old house was sold by the nation and bought by the commune, to do duty as town hall, mayor's office, and court-house; for M. Sarcus had sat there since the institution of justices of the peace.

This outline sketch will give the reader some idea of the market-square of Soulanges, where the charming central fountain stands which the Marechal de Soulanges brought from Italy in 1520. No great city need blush to own such a monument. A jet of water, brought from a spring high up on the hillside, plays perpetually over a group of four white marble Cupids, who bear a basket full of grapes on their heads, and distribute the water from the conch shells in their hands.

Perhaps Emile Blondet is the last lettered traveller who will pass that way; but if in the coming time another should penetrate to Soulanges, he will at once recognize in the market-square, the "public place" of Spanish drama and Molière's plays, an old familiar piece of stage scenery, and abiding witness to the fact that comedy is the invention of a warm climate, where the business of life is largely carried on out of doors and in public. The market-place at Soulanges resembles the conventional square of the stage the more closely in that the two principal streets of the town enter it from either side just opposite the fountain, furnishing an exact equivalent of the wings whence masters and servants issue to meet, and whither they fly to avoid each other.

At the corner of one of these streets, Maître Lupin's scutcheon hung, gloriously conspicuous. The square is the aristocratic quarter of Soulanges; Sarcus, Guerbet the receiver of taxes, Brunet, Gourdon the registrar, and his brother the doctor, and old M. Gendrin-Vattebled, Crown Agent of Woods and Forests, all lived round about it, and

being mindful of the name given to their town, all made a point of keeping their houses in handsome repair.

"Mme. Soudry's house," as it was called (for the first person in the commune was totally eclipsed by the potent personality of the late Mlle. Laguerre's waiting-woman)—Mme. Soudry's house was entirely modern. It had been built by a wealthy wine merchant, a Soulanges man who had made money in Paris and returned in 1793 to buy corn for his native town. The mob massacred him for a "regrater," a miserable stonemason (Godain's uncle) having raised the cry after a dispute which arose out of the building of the fine new house.

The next of kin quarrelled so long and heartily over the property that when Soudry came back in 1798 he was able to buy the wine merchant's palace for one thousand crowns *in coin*. He let it at first to the department for a police-station; but in 1811 Mlle. Cochet (whom he consulted on all points) warmly opposed a renewal of the lease; it was impossible to live in a house "in concubinage with the barracks," she said. So a police-station was built in a side street close to the town hall for the gendarmerie, at the expense of the town of Soulanges, and the police sergeant's house, being relieved of the defiling presence of the gendarmerie and their horses, was forthwith swept and garnished.

It is a single-story house, with attics in the mansard roof. On three sides it looks out over a wide view; to wit, over the market-place, the "lake," and the garden; but the fourth gives upon the yard which lies between it and the neighboring house of a grocer—Wattebled by name—a man who did not move in the "best society" in Soulanges. He was the father of the "beautiful Mme. Plissoud," of whom more must presently be said.

Every little town has its "beautiful Madame Such-an-one," just as it boasts its Socquard and its Cafe de la Paix.

It is easy to guess that the side of the house which overlooks the lake likewise looks out upon a terraced garden, sloping, not over-steeply, down to the stone balustrade,

which borders it along the roadside. On every step of the flight which descends from the terrace to the garden stands a myrtle, or pomegranate, or an orange-tree, visible justifications of a small conservatory below—a *preservatory*, as Mme. Soudry persistently miscalls it. The house door on the side of the market-place is approached by a short flight of steps. The great gateway is seldom used, except on great occasions, after the usual habit of a country town, or to admit the tradespeople or the master's horse. The friends of the family paid their calls on foot, and climbed the flight of steps to the street door.

The Soudry mansion is a dreary-looking house. Every course of masonry is marked out by "channel joints," as masons call them; the moldings round the windows are alternately thick and thin, after the style of the Gabriel and Perronnet wings of the Tuileries. Such architectural ornament in a very small town gives a monumental look to a house already grown famous in the district.

In the opposite corner of the market-place stood Socquard's celebrated Cafe de la Paix, which, with the too enchanting Tivoli, deserves a more detailed description in its place than the Soudry mansion.

Rigou very seldom came to Soulanges; for everybody, Lupin the notary, Gaubertin, Soudry, and Gendrin alike, went to Blangy to call on him—such fear men had of Rigou. But any experienced person, and the ex-Benedictine was experienced, would have imitated his reserve. In order to make this clear, it is necessary to give a sketch of the personages who were spoken of in the neighborhood as belonging to the "best society of Soulanges."

The oddest figure among them all was, as you may imagine, Mme. Soudry herself. Hers is a portrait that demands an infinity of minute touches, if it is to do justice to the original.

Mme. Soudry permitted herself "a suspicion of rouge," in imitation of Mlle. Laguerre; but that suspicion, by sheer force of habit, had become an unmistakable patch of vermil-

ion on either cheek, such as our grandsires picturesquely described as "carriage wheels." As the wrinkles deepened and multiplied on the mayoress's countenance, she fondly tried to fill them up with paint; then finding that her brow grew too sallow by far, and her temples showed time's polish, she laid on ceruse, and traced out a network of youthful veins in a delicate blue. The painting enhanced the liveliness of eyes that were bold enough already, insomuch that the mask would have struck a stranger as something passing strange; but Soulanges, being accustomed to this brilliant display of art, regarded Mme. Soudry as a great beauty.

With a clumsy shapeless figure she wore her gowns cut low at the throat, displaying shoulders and bosom whitened and enamelled to match her face; but, luckily, a desire to flaunt her magnificent laces induced her to partially veil these chemical products. She always wore a stiff corset bodice of prodigious depth, bedizened with knots even down to the extreme point, and her skirts rustled with silk and furbelows.

Her apparel justified the use of the word *attire*, which will soon be inexplicable. This evening she wore brocade of price, for she had a hundred dresses, each one richer than the last, all from Mlle. Laguerre's vast and splendid wardrobe, and all remodelled by her in the height of the fashion of the year 1808. Mme. Soudry's gorgeous cap, adorned with loops of cherry-colored satin to match the ribbons on her gown, seemed to ride triumphant on the powdered waves of her yellow wig.

Try to imagine beneath that too fascinating headgear a monkey face of monstrous ugliness; a snub nose, meagre enough for a Death's head, separated by a broad space of bristles from a mouthful of artificial teeth in which the sounds were entangled as in a hunting-horn—and though it may puzzle you to discover how the best society, and, in fact, the whole town of Soulanges, could regard Mme. Soudry as a beauty, the mental process may recall to your mind a recent succinct treatise *ex professo* by one of the wittiest women

of our day on the art of acquiring a reputation for beauty by the judicious selection and management of accessories.

Mme. Soudry had, in the first place, surrounded herself with the splendid presents which had been heaped upon her mistress—*fructus belli*, as the sometime Benedictine called them. And, in the second, she had turned her ugliness to account by emphasizing it and carrying it with a certain air which can only be acquired in Paris, a knack known to the vulgarest Parisienne, who is always more or less of a mimic. Mme. Soudry's figure, much restricted round the waist, was enormous about the hips: she wore diamonds in her ears, and loaded her fingers with rings; and, by way of final adornment, a cockchafer, twin topazes with a diamond head, blazed from the height of her bodice in a cleft between two mountains besprinkled with pearl powder. This jewel, a gift from "dear mistress," was the talk of the department. Mme. Soudry's arms were invariably bare (another practice copied from Mlle. Laguerre), and she fluttered an ivory fan painted by Boucher with two tiny roses by way of stud-pins.

When Mme. Soudry walked abroad she carried a real eighteenth century parasol above her head, a bamboo frame covered with green silk, and bordered with a green fringe; thus equipped, any passer-by who should have seen her on the terrace might have taken her (at a sufficient distance) for a figure out of one of Watteau's pictures.

In that drawing-room, hung with crimson brocade and crimson curtains lined with white silk, where the chimney piece was covered with knick-knacks and souvenirs of the palmy days of Louis Quinze, with the fire-dogs and andirons on the hearth (lily stems borne aloft by infant Cupids), where the furniture, *à pieds de biche*, was covered with gilding, it was conceivable how the mistress of the mansion had come by the title of "the beautiful Mme. Soudry." The house came to be a kind of local superstition in the principal town in the district.

And if the best society of Soulanges believed in its queen, that queen had no less belief in herself. In the space of

seven years La Cochet had so completely succeeded in sinking the lady's-maid in the mayoress, that not merely had Soulanges forgotten her late employment, but she herself had begun to believe that she was a gentlewoman. So well did she remember her mistress's ways, her manner, her gestures, her falsetto voice, the little movements of her head, that when she surrounded herself with that mistress's opulence she reproduced her insolence. Mme. Soudry knew her eighteenth century; she had anecdotes of great nobles, like their inter-relationships, at her fingers' ends, and her backstairs erudition provided her with a stock of conversation which smacked of familiarity with *Œil-de-bœuf*. Her waiting-woman's wit passed current in her circle for the most refined *esprit*. Intrinsically, if you will, the mayoress was a counterfeit gem, but how should barbarians know the difference between the diamond and its paste imitation?

She, too, in her own circle was a divinity, as her mistress had been in her day; she was flattered by those who were sure of a dinner at her house once a week, and of coffee and liqueurs if (as not seldom happened) they dropped in of an evening about the time of dessert. No woman's head could have stood the powerful intoxicating influence of that never-failing incense. In the winter time, when the cosey drawing-room was bright with the light of wax-candles, she saw it filled with the wealthiest men in the place, who repaid her in compliments for delicate liqueurs and exquisite wines from "dear mistress's" cellars. The friends of the house and their wives had to all intents and purposes the usufruct of this luxury, while they economized in fuel and candle-light. For which reasons it was proclaimed for five leagues round about, nay, at Ville-aux-Fayes itself, when the notables of the department were passed in review, that "Mme. Soudry makes an admirable hostess; she keeps open house, and it is a wonderfully pleasant house. She understands how to live up to her fortune. She can enjoy a joke. And what handsome plate! There is not such another house out of Paris!"

Bouret had given that plate to Mlle. Laguerre. It was a splendid service, the work of the great Germain, and, in plain language, La Soudry had stolen it; when Mlle. Laguerre died, the woman simply took it up to her own room, and the next-of-kin, who knew nothing about their property, could never put in a claim for missing items.

For some little time it had been the fashion among the twelve or fifteen persons of whom the "best society" in Soulanges was composed to speak of Mme. Soudry as of an "intimate friend of Mlle. Laguerre," and to fight shy of the word "waiting-woman." To hear them talk, La Cochet might have sacrificed herself by becoming the great actress's companion.

Strange, but true it is, that all these confirmed illusions spread and grew in Mme. Soudry, till they invaded the reality-requiring region of the heart. She ruled her husband despotically,

The gendarme being constrained to show fondness for a wife, older than himself by ten years, who kept the purse-strings in her own hands, encouraged her in the notions which she entertained of her beauty. Nevertheless, at times, when this one or that envied him his good fortune, he would wish that they could exchange places with him; and he was at as great pains to hide his peccadilloes as if a young and idolized wife were in the case. Only within the last few days had he contrived to introduce a pretty housemaid into the establishment.

Does the portrait of the queen of Soulanges seem to be something of a caricature? The type might still be found here and there in the provinces in those days, among women on the outskirts of nobility or the higher regions of finance; witness the widow of a farmer-general in Touraine, who still applied fillets of veal to her face in the interests of her complexion. But the present portrait, painted to the life though it is, is incomplete without its setting of brilliants, and the queen's principal courtiers must be sketched, were it only to explain how formidable such Liliputians may become,

and to throw light upon the dissemination of opinion in out-of-the-way places.

Lest any should be deceived, it may be said that there are places like Soulanges which cannot be described as either city, town, or village, yet partake of the nature of all three. In such places the faces of the people are quite different from those which you shall see in the heart of our good, overgrown, dirty provincial cities; for the townsman is half a countryman, and this blend produces some of the queerest of queer characters.

Mme. Soudry disposed of, Notary Lupin, steward of the manor of Soulanges, ranks second in importance; for it is scarcely worth while to mention old Gendrin-Vattebled, the Crown agent of Woods and Forests, a nonagenarian on the brink of the grave, who had never left his house since the advent of Mme. Soudry. Gendrin-Vattebled had reigned over Soulanges in his quality of a man who had held the same post since the time of Louis XV., and in his lucid intervals he still spoke of the jurisdiction of the *Table de Marbre.*

Five-and-forty springs had bloomed for Lupin, but he was still fresh and pink-complexioned, thanks to the full habit of body which grows inevitably upon a man of sedentary life; he still sang his ballad, and wore the elegant costume of the drawing-room performer. In his carefully varnished boots and waistcoat of brimstone-yellow, his tight coats, rich silk stocks, and trousers in the latest fashion, Lupin looked almost like a Parisian. He had his hair curled by the hairdresser, who fulfilled the functions of the "Gazette" in Soulanges, and altogether lived up to the character of lady-killer, earned by an intimacy with Mme. Money-Sarcus; for, to compare small things with great, that conquest had been in his life pretty much what the Campaigns of Italy were in the career of Napoleon. Lupin was the only one of the circle who went to Paris, where he paid visits to the Soulanges family in town. He had only to open his mouth, and the supremacy of his sway

exercised in his double character of coxcomb and man of taste was at once apparent. He pronounced judgment on all things by three words, the positive, comparative, and superlative of dispraise—*rusty*, *out-of-date*, and *obsolete*.

A man or a woman or a piece of furniture might be "rusty"; then, to mark the comparative degree of futility, "out-of-date"; and finally, by way of superlative and third term, "obsolete." *Obsolete!* 'twas the critic's "dead-and-done-with," the domdaniel of contempt. Mere "rust" might be rubbed off, "out-of-date" was past praying for; but "*obsolete!*" oh, better never to have issued from nothingness!

For praise, Lupin was reduced to the word "charming," redoubled if required. "Charming!"—that was the positive term of admiration; "charming! charming!"—you might set your mind at rest. "Charming! charming! charming!"—you might throw down the ladder, for the heaven of perfection had been scaled.

This scrivener—he was wont to speak of himself as the scrivener, quill-driver, and petty attorney, jestingly putting himself above his calling—this scrivener carried on a flirtation with the mayoress, who felt a certain weakness for Lupin, although he had fair hair and wore spectacles, and La Cochet had always admired dark men with mustaches, and tufts upon their finger-joints—the Hercules type, in short. But now she made an exception in Lupin's favor on account of his elegance, feeling, besides, that her social triumph in Soulanges would be incomplete without an adorer; though as yet, to Soudry's disgust, none of the queen's adorers had dared to overstep the limits of respectful homage.

Lupin was a baritone, somewhat given to sample-singing in corners or upon the terrace, by way of reminding the world of his social gift, a reef upon which the socially-gifted, and, alas! sometimes even men of genius, are apt to make shipwreck.

He had married an heiress in sabots and blue stockings,

the only daughter of a salt merchant who made his fortune during the Revolution, when the reaction against the *gabelle* put enormous sums into the pockets of salt smugglers. Lupin prudently kept his wife in the background, and Bébelle was sustained by a Platonic passion for his very handsome head-clerk, one Bonnac, who had nothing but his salary, and played upon a lower stage the part taken by his employer in the "best society."

Madame Lupin's education had been prodigiously neglected. She only appeared in public on state occasions, in the form of an enormous tun of Burgundy draped with velvet, and surmounted by a little head deeply sunk in a pair of shoulders of uncertain hue. By no effort could her girdle be induced to stay in its natural place, and Bebelle candidly admitted that prudence forbade her to wear corsets. It would have out-tasked the imagination of a poet, nay, of an inventor, to discover in Bebelle's back any trace of the bewitching curves of the vertebral outline of any woman who is a woman.

Bebelle, as round as a tortoise, belonged to some invertebrate feminine order. Her appalling development of cellular tissue must, however, have been not a little reassuring for Lupin whenever he thought of the portly Bebelle's little fancy—for "Bebelle" he unblushingly called her, and nobody thought of laughing.

"What do you call your wife?" Money-Sarcus inquired one day. He could not digest the "out-of-date" applied to a new piece of furniture which he had bought as a bargain.

"My wife, unlike yours, is still undefined," retorted Lupin.

A subtle brain lurked beneath Lupin's coarse exterior; he had the sense to hold his tongue about wealth at least as considerable as Rigou's fortune.

"Young Lupin," Amaury Lupin, was an affliction to his parent. He refused to follow the paternal calling, he became one of the Don Juans of the valley, and abused the privileges of an only son by enormous drains on the cash-

box; yet he never exceeded his father's indulgence, for after each fresh escapade Lupin senior remarked, "After all, I was just the same in my time." Amaury never went near Mme. Soudry, who "plagued him" (*sic*). Some memory had inspired the waiting-woman with the notion of "forming" a young man who sought his pleasures in the billiard-room at the Café de la Paix. Amaury Lupin frequented low company, and even the society of such as Bonnebault. He was having his fling (as Mme. Soudry put it), and his one answer to his father's remonstrances was the cry of "Send me to Paris, I am tired of this!"

Lupin's fate, alas! was that of most bucks, a quasi-conjugal entanglement. It was well known that he was passionately attached to Mme. Euphemie Plissoud, whose husband was Brunet's fellow clerk of the peace, and that he had no secrets from her. The fair Euphemie, the daughter of Wattebled the grocer, reigned, like Mme. Soudry, in a lower social sphere. Plissoud, who was understood to authorize his wife's conduct, was despised on this account by the "best society," and regarded as second-rate.

If Lupin was the vocalist, Dr. Gourdon was the man of science in the "best society." It was said of him that "We have here a man of science of the first rank"; and Mme. Soudry, a competent critic in matters musical (in that she had announced Messieurs Gluck and Piccini when they came to call of a morning upon her mistress, and had dressed Mlle. Laguerre at the Opera at night)—Mme. Soudry, who had persuaded every one, including Lupin himself, that he would have made a fortune with that voice, would deplore the fact that the doctor had given none of his ideas to the world.

Dr. Gourdon, who took all his ideas straight from Buffon and Cuvier, could scarcely have set himself up for a man of science in the eyes of Soulanges with such an outfit, but he was making a collection of shells and a *hortus siccus*, and could stuff birds to boot—in fact, he coveted the distinction of leaving a Natural History Museum to the town, and on

these grounds he was accepted all over the department as a second Buffon.

In appearance Dr. Gourdon was not unlike a Genevese banker. He had the same air of pedantry, the same chilly manner and puritanical neatness; but in his case the money, like the business shrewdness, had been omitted. He was wont to exhibit with exceeding complacency his famous natural history collection, comprising a stuffed bear and a marmot (deceased on their passage through the town), a very complete collection of the local rodents, shrew mice, field mice, house mice, rats, and the like, together with all the rare birds shot in that part of Burgundy, and conspicuous among these last an Alpine eagle caught among the Jura. Gourdon also possessed a good many specimens of *lepidoptera*—a word which raised hopes of monstrosities, so that the reality was usually greeted with, "Why, they are butterflies!"—a very pretty collection of fossil shells, which for the most part had come to him by way of bequest; and, to conclude the list, a quantity of specimens of the minerals of the Jura and Burgundy.

The whole first floor of Dr. Gourdon's house was occupied by these treasures, which were established behind glass doors in cupboards, above rows of drawers full of insects. Nor did they fail to produce a certain impression, due partly to the eccentricities of the labels, partly to the magic charm of color, and partly also to the vast number of objects which no one notices out of doors, though they become wonderful as soon as they are set behind a sheet of glass. There was a day set apart for going to see Dr. Gourdon's collection.

"I have five hundred ornithological specimens," he would announce to the curious, "two hundred mammals, five thousand insects, three thousand shells, and seven hundred specimen minerals."

"What patience you must have had!" the ladies would exclaim, and Gourdon would reply, "A man ought to do something for his native place."

Gourdon's vanity drew a prodigious toll from his dead beasts and birds by the remark, "All this has been left to the town in my will"; and how his visitors admired his "philanthropy!" They talked of devoting the whole second floor of the town hall (after the doctor's death) to the housing of the Gourdon Museum.

"I count on the gratitude of my fellow townsmen to associate my name with my collection," he would say in reply to this suggestion, "for I do not dare to hope that they will set my bust there in marble—"

"Why, surely that would be the least that they could do for you!" would be the answer; "are you not the glory of Soulanges?" And in the end the man came to look upon himself as one of the great men of Burgundy.

The safest investments are not the public funds, but those which are inscribed in the name of self-love, and the learned naturalist, on Lupin's grammatical system, might be described as a "happy, happy, happy man!"

Gourdon, his brother, the registrar of the court, was a little weasel-faced man. All his features seemed to have crowded themselves together in the neighborhood of his neck, in such a sort that his nose was a kind of starting-point whence the various lines of forehead, cheek, and mouth went their various ways, much as all the ravines on a mountain-side begin at its summit. He was one of the great poets of Burgundy, a second Piron, so it was said. The double merit of the brothers attracted notice in the chief town of the department.

"We have the two brothers Gourdon at Soulanges," it was said, "two very remarkable men, men who would more than hold their own in Paris."

The poet was an exceedingly dexterous player at cup-and-ball, a mania which bred another mania, for it inspired him with the idea of celebrating in verse a game which had so great a vogue in the eighteenth century. (The manias of mediocracy are apt to appear in pairs.) Gourdon junior was delivered of his poem during the time of Napoleon, so it is

needless to mention the sound and sensible school to which he belonged. Luce de Lancival, Parny, Saint-Lambert, Roucher, Vigée, Andrieux, and Berchoux were his heroes, and Delille was his idol until the day when the best society in Soulanges raised the question whether Gourdon did not surpass Delille. From that time forth the registrar spoke of his model as *Monsieur l'Abbé Delille* with unnecessary courtesy.

Poems achieved between the years 1780 and 1814 were all modelled on the same pattern; and the great poem on the *bilboquet*, or cup-and-ball, may be taken as a representative specimen. Boileau's *Lutrin* is the Saturn of a whole abortive progeny of playful pieces, most of them limited to four cantos, for it was generally recognized that the subject-matter was apt to grow thin in six.

Gourdon's poem on the cup-and-ball—the *Bilboquéide*—obeyed the rules of poetical composition invariably observed in such cases, for all these departmental compositions are made from the same pattern. The first canto describes the subject of the poem, and begins, like Gourdon's effort, with an invocation much on this wise:

"I sing the Sport which suits with every Age
The Small and Great, the Simple and the Sage;
When our deft Hand the boxwood Spike extends
To catch the transpierced Globe as it descends,
Delightful Pastime, sovran cure for Spleen.
If Palamedes had this Toy foreseen,
How had he longed another Wreath to claim,
And envied us the invention of the Game!
Muse of the Loves of Laughter and of Glee
Descend upon my roof and visit me,
A votary of Themis striving still
Official paper with my Rhymes to fill,
Descend and charm." . . . .

Then followed a description of the game itself, and of the most elegant *bilboquets* known to history, an account of the part they played in the prosperity of the "Green Monkey" and other toyshops, a digression touching statistics in this connection, and finally Gourdon brought his

first canto to an end with three lines which recall the conclusion of every similar production—

> "Thus do the Arts, nay, even Science' self,
> Taking the Object into their employ,
> Turn to their profit Pleasure's trifling Toy."

The second canto (as usual) described diverse manners of using the "object" and the ways in which it might serve its owner in society and with the fair sex. It will suffice to quote a single passage in which the player goes through his exercises beneath the eyes of the "beloved object," and the rest may be left to the imaginations of amateurs of this serious literature—

> "Watch yonder Player 'mid the gazers all,
> His eye fixed fondly on the iv'ry Ball,
> How heedfully he spies with caution nice
> Its Movement in parabola precise.
> Thrice has the Globe described its curve complete,
> He lays his Triumph at his Idol's feet,
> When lo!—the Disk its destiny has missed,
> And hits the careless Player on the fist!
> He lifts his martyred digits to his lips,
> A flying Kiss consoles his Finger-tips.
> How canst thou, Ingrate, of thy luck complain?
> A smile o'erpays thee for the trifling pain."

It was this piece of description (worthy of Virgil) which raised the question whether Gourdon had not surpassed Delille. The matter-of-fact Brunet objected to the word *disk*, which provided society with matter for discussion during the best part of a twelvemonth. But one evening when both sides had argued themselves red in the face, Dr. Gourdon, the man of science, completely crushed the *antidisk-ites*.

"The moon," said he, "styled a 'disk' by the poets, is a globe."

"How do you know?" retorted Brunet. "We have never seen the other side of it."

The third canto contained the inevitable anecdote, a story of a famous minister of Louis XVI., which everybody knows by heart; but, to quote the formula hallowed by constant use

in the "Debats" between 1810 and 1814, "it had borrowed novel graces from poesy and from the charm which the author had infused into his verse."

The fourth canto, which summed up the work, concluded with the following audacious lines of the kind written for private circulation from 1810 to 1814; lines which first saw the light in 1824, after the death of Napoleon:

"Thus have I dared to sing 'mid War's alarms,
Ah! would that Monarchs bore no other Arms,
Ah! would that Nations in their Hours of ease
Beguiled the time with Pleasures such as these!
To Burgundy, too long, alas! forlorn,
Saturn's and Rhea's days again were born."

These elegant verses were incorporated in the first and only edition, the *editio princeps*, which issued from the press of Bournier, the printer at Ville-aux-Fayes.

One hundred subscribers, by an offering of three francs apiece, insured immortality to the poem, and established a dangerous precedent; and this was the more handsome of them, for that every one of the subscribers had heard every line of the verses a hundred times.

Mme. Soudry had but recently suppressed the cup-and-ball which used to lie on a console table in her drawing-room, a pretext for frequent quotations; she found out at last that she had a rival in the toy.

As for the poet himself, who bragged of his works in manuscript, it will be a sufficient description of him to record the way in which he announced to the "best society" of Soulanges that a rival poet had appeared.

"Have you heard the strange news?" he had said (two years before the story begins). "There is *another* poet in Burgundy.—Yes," he went on, seeing the astonishment expressed in all faces, "he comes from Mâcon. But you would never imagine what he is at work upon. He is putting the clouds into rhyme—"

"They did very well, left *blank*," said Guerbet the punster.

"It is the queerest rigmarole! Lakes and stars and billows! Not a single rational image, not a trace of didactic intention; he is ignorant of the very sources of poetry. He calls the sky by its proper name; he calls the moon, the moon, plump and plain, instead of calling it the 'orb of night!' See what lengths you may go by straining after originality!" cried Gourdon dolorously. "Poor young fellow! A born Burgundian, and he takes to singing the praise of water; it makes you sorry to see it! If he had but come and consulted *me*, I would have given him the finest subject in the world, a poem on wine—'The Bacchiad'—which I myself feel too old to undertake now."

The great poet[1] is still ignorant of his greatest triumph (due, it is true, to his Burgundian extraction). He was once the talk of Soulanges, where the very names of the modern "Pléiade" were unknown.

Scores of Gourdons lived and sang under the Empire, which some have blamed, forsooth, for the neglect of letters! Turn to your booksellers' catalogues, and behold poem after poem on the Turning-lathe, the Game of Draughts, Backgammon, Geography, Typography, Comedy, and what not, to say nothing of masterpieces so much cried up as Delille on Pity, Imagination, and Conversation, or Berchoux on Gastronomy, "Dansomanie," and the like. Very probably in another fifty years readers will laugh at our thousand and one poems, modelled on the "Méditations" and "Orientales." Who can foresee the changes of taste, the caprices of fashion, the transformations of man's mind? Each generation sweeps away all before it, even down to the traces of the idols which it finds upon its way; each generation sets up new gods to be worshipped and thrown down in turn by the next.

Sarcus, a nice, little, dappled-gray, elderly man, divided his time between Themis and Flora—which is to say, between the Court and his hothouse. For the past twelve

[1] Lamartine.

years he had been meditating a book to be entitled "The History of the Institution of Justices of the Peace." The political and judicial aspects of these functionaries, he was wont to observe, had already undergone several changes. Justices of the peace existed in virtue of the Code of Brumaire of the year IV.; but an office so important, so invaluable to the country, had lost its *prestige*, because the emoluments attached to an appointment which ought to be made for life were out of all proportion to the dignity of the office. It was laid to Sarcus's charge that he was a Freethinker; and he was considered to be the politician of the set, which, in plain language, as you will guess, means that he was the most tiresome person in it. He was said "to talk like a book." Gaubertin promised him the Cross of the Legion of Honor, but postponed fulfilment until the day when he (Gaubertin) should succeed Leclercq and take his seat in the Centre-Left.

Guerbet, the local wit and receiver of taxes, was a stout, heavy man, with a butter face, a false *toupet*, and gold rings in the ears, which lived in a state of continual friction with his shirt collar. Guerbet dabbled in pomology. He prided himself on the possession of the finest fruit-trees in the district; he forced early vegetables, which appeared about a month after their advent in Paris, and grew the most tropical products in his hotbeds; pineapples, to wit, and nectarines, and green peas; and when a pottle of strawberries was sold at ten sous in Paris, he would bring Mme. Soudry a handful with no little pride.

In M. Vermut the druggist Soulanges possessed a chemist who had a little more right to his title than Sarcus the statesman, or Lupin the singer, or Gourdon senior, the man of science, or his brother the poet. Yet the best society of Soulanges held Vermut rather cheap, and beyond that society he was not known at all. Perhaps the circle felt instinctively the real superiority of the thinker among them who never said a word, and listened to nonsense with a satirical smile; so they threw doubts on his learning, and

questioned it *sotto voce*. Outside the circle no one troubled their heads about it.

Vermut was the butt of Mme. Soudry's salon. No society is complete without a victim; there must be somebody to compassionate, and banter, and patronize, and scorn. In the first place, Vermut, with his head full of scientific problems, used to come to the house with his cravat untied and his waistcoat unfastened, and wore a green jacket, usually stained. Furthermore, he was a fair mark for jokes on account of a countenance so babyish that old Guerbet used to say that he had taken it from his patients. In places behind the times like Soulanges, country apothecaries are still employed as they used to be in the days when Pourceaugnac fell a victim to a practical joke, and these respectable practitioners, the better to establish their calling, demand an indemnity of displacement.

The little man, endowed with the patience of a chemist, could not "enjoy" his wife, to use the provincialism which signifies the abolition of the marital rule. Mme. Vermut, a charming lively woman, a woman of spirit moreover, who could lose two whole francs at cards without a word, railed at her spouse, pursued him with epigrams, and held him up for an idiot only fit to distil dulness. She was one of those women whose mission it is to keep a little town lively; she was the salt of this corner of the earth, kitchen salt, it is true, but what salt it was! She indulged in boisterous jokes, but these were overlooked. She thought nothing of telling M. Taupin, a white-haired man of seventy, to "shut up, monkey!"

The miller of Soulanges had fifty thousand francs a year and an only daughter, whom Lupin had in his mind for Amaury, for he had given up all hope by this time of Mlle. Gaubertin, and President Gaubertin thought of the same girl for his own son, the registrar of mortgages. Here again interests clashed. This miller, a Sarcus-Taupin, was the Nucingen of the town. He was said to have three million francs, but he would not join any combination. He thought of noth-

ing but his flour-mill, and of how to get all the trade into his own hands, and was chiefly remarkable for the signal absence of courtesy or civility in his manner.

Old Guerbet, the brother of the postmaster at Conches, had about ten thousand francs a year of his own besides his professional income. The Gourdons were well-to-do men. The doctor had married the only daughter of the very old M. Gendrin-Vattebled, Crown Agent of Woods and Forests, who could not be expected to last much longer; while the registrar had wedded the Abbe Taupin's niece and sole heiress. The Abbe Taupin, cure of Soulanges, was a fat priest, ensconced in his living like a rat in a cheese.

The pliant ecclesiastic was very popular in Soulanges; he was quite at home in the best society, kindly and good-natured with the "second-rate," and apostolic with the unfortunate. Cousin to the miller, and related to both the Sarcus families, he belonged to the district, and was part of the system of Mediocracy. Taupin was thrifty, never dined at home, went to weddings and came away before the dancing began, and never meddled with politics; he demanded and obtained outward conformity to the requirements of religion, urging his pleas "in my professional capacity." And he was allowed to have his way. "We have a good cure," people used to say of him. The Bishop, who knew Soulanges well, was not deceived as to the merit of the ecclesiastic; but it was something to find a man who could induce such a town to accept the forms of religion, a man who could fill the church of a Sunday and preach a sermon to a slumbering congregation.

The Gourdons' ladies—for at Soulanges, as in Dresden and some other German capitals, those who move in the best society greet each other with the inquiry, "How is your lady?" and people say, "He was not there with his lady," or "I saw his lady and the young ladies." A Parisian who should say "his wife," or "womenkind" would create a sensation, and be set down for a man of the worst style. At Soulanges, as at Geneva, Dresden, and Brussels, these words

are never used; Brussels shopkeepers may put "wife of such a one" above their shop doors, but at Soulanges "your good lady" is the only permissible formula. To resume—the Gourdons' ladies can only be compared to the luckless supernumeraries of second-rate theatres known to Parisian audiences, who frequently take the *artistes* for a laughing stock; it will suffice to say that they belonged to the order of "nice little things," and their portraits will be complete, for the most unlettered bourgeois can look about him and find examples of these necessary beings.

It is scarcely worth while to remark that Guerbet understood finance admirably well, and that Soudry would have made a minister of war, for every worthy townsman was equipped with the imaginary specialty necessary to the existence of a provincial; and not only so, each one was free to cultivate his own private plot in the domain of human vanity without fear of rivalry or disturbance from his neighbor.

If Cuvier, travelling *incognito*, had passed through the town, the best society of Soulanges would have felt convinced that his knowledge was a mere trifle compared with Dr. Gourdon's scientific attainments. Nourrit and his "fine thread of voice," as the notary called it with patronizing indulgence, would have been thought scarce worthy to accompany the nightingale of Soulanges; and as for the versifier whose works were just passing through Bournier's press, it was incredible that a poet of equal merit should be found in Paris now that Delille was dead.

This provincial bourgeoisie, in its sleek self-satisfaction, could take precedence of all social superiority. Only those who have spent some portion of their lives in a small country town of this kind can form any idea of the exceeding complacency which overspread the countenances of these folk who took themselves for the cœliac plexus of France. Gifted as they were with incredible perverse ingenuity, they had decided in their wisdom that one of the heroes of Essling was a coward, Mme. de Montcornet a woman of

scandalous life, and the Abbe Brossette a petty intriguer, and within a fortnight of the purchase of the Aigues they discovered the General's origin, and dubbed him the "Upholsterer."

If Rigou, Soudry, and Gaubertin had all of them lived at Ville-aux-Fayes, there would have been a quarrel; their pretensions must inevitably have come into collision; but Fate ordained that the Lucullus of Blangy should feel that solitude was a necessity if he was to combine usury and sensuality in peace; while Mme. Soudry had sense enough to see that she could only reign in such a place as Soulanges, and Gaubertin found Ville-aux-Fayes a central position for his business. Those who find amusement in the study of social intricacies will admit that Montcornet had a run of ill luck when he fell among such foes, all living sufficiently far apart to revolve in their separate spheres of power and vanity. The malignant planets were but ten times the more potent for mischief because they never crossed each other's paths.

Yet, though the worthy Soulangeois were proud of their leisured lives, and regarded their society as distinctly more agreeable than that of Ville-aux-Fayes, repeating with ludicrous pomposity that "Soulanges is the place for pleasure and society" (a saying current in the valley), it would scarcely be prudent to suppose that Ville-aux-Fayes admitted this supremacy. The Gaubertin salon laughed *in petto* at the Soudry salon. Gaubertin would say, "Ours is a busy town, a great business place, and some of us are fools enough to plague ourselves with money-making," and from his manner it was easy to discern a slight antagonism between the earth and the moon. The moon believed that she was useful to the earth, and the earth controlled the moon.

Both earth and moon lived, however, on terms of the closest intimacy. At Carnival-tide the best society of Soulanges went in a body to the four dances given in turn by Gaubertin, Gendrin, Leclercq, and Soudry junior, the pub-

lic prosecutor. Every Sunday the public prosecutor and his wife, with M., Mme., and Mlle. Elise Gaubertin, came over to Soulanges to dine with the Soudrys. When the sub-prefect was invited, and the postmaster, Guerbet from Conches, came to take potluck, Soulanges beheld the spectacle of four official carriages stopping the way before the Soudry mansion.

II

THE QUEEN'S DRAWING-ROOM

RIGOU TIMED his arrival for half-past five, knowing that he should find every one at his post at that hour. The mayor, like everybody else in the town, dined at three o'clock, following the eighteenth century usage; so from five till nine in the evening the Soulanges notables exchanged news, delivered political speeches, commented on all the gossip of the valley, and discussed the doings of the folk at the Aigues. This last topic found them in conversation for an hour daily. Every one made a point of learning something on that head, and it was well known besides that to bring news of the Aigues was a way of recommending yourself to your host and hostess.

After this indispensable review of things in general, the company betook themselves to boston, the only game which the queen could play. The stout old Guerbet would mimic Madame Isaure (Gaubertin's wife), ridiculing her finical airs, her thin voice, prim mouth, and missish manners; the Cure Taupin would retail some bit of news from Ville-aux-Fayes; Mme. Soudry was saturated with fulsome compliments; and then came the final, "We have had a delightful game of boston."

Rigou was too selfish to take the trouble to come a distance of twelve kilometres to hear the trash talked in Mme. Soudry's drawing-room, and to see a monkey masquerading

as an elderly woman. He was greatly the superior of the company by ability and education, and never showed himself in Soulanges save on the rare occasions when he went thither to consult his notary, Lupin. Rigou was not expected to be neighborly; his habits and business occupations absolved him; and his health (he said) did not permit him to return at night along the road by the river, when "the damp was rising" from the Thune.

The tall, gaunt usurer, moreover, overawed Mme. Soudry's drawing-room. Instinctively it was felt that in this man there was a tiger with claws of steel; that the malignance of a savage was combined with the wisdom implanted in the cloister and matured by the sun of gold, wisdom in which Gaubertin had never willingly trusted.

Urbain, Soudry's man, sitting on a bench under the dining-room windows, looked up and saw the little basket-chaise as it passed the Cafe de la Paix. He shaded his eyes to watch it, while he chatted with Socquard the saloon-keeper.

"That is old Rigou! The gate will have to be opened. You hold his horse, Socquard," he said familiarly. Urbain had been in a cavalry regiment, and when he failed to obtain a transfer into the gendarmerie he took service with Soudry instead. He now went in to open the great gate into the courtyard.

The great Socquard, as you see, was paying an informal call; but so it is with many illustrious personages, they condescend to walk, and sneeze, and eat, and sleep for all the world like ordinary mortals.

Socquard was by birth a Hercules. He could carry eleven hundredweight, he could break a man's back with one blow of his fist, twist an iron bar, or stop a cart with a horse harnessed to it. He was the Milo of Crotona of the valley, his fame spread all over the department, and absurd fables were told of him, as of most celebrities. It was said, for instance, in the Morvan that one day he picked up a poor woman, donkey, and bundles and all, and carried her to market, that he had eaten an ox at a sitting, and drunk

a quarter cask of wine in a day, and the like. Socquard, a short, thickset man with a placid countenance, was as meek as any maid, he was broad in the shoulders, and deep-chested; and though his lungs heaved like the bellows in a smithy, his voice was so thin and clear that it startled any one who heard it for the first time.

Like Tonsard, whose reputation for ferocity saved him the trouble of giving proof of it, like every man who is hedged about by a reputation of any kind, Socquard never displayed his triumphant powers, except at the particular request and prayer of his friends. Just now he held the horse's head while the public prosecutor's father-in-law dismounted and turned to apply himself to the flight of steps.

"All well at home, M. Rigou?" inquired the illustrious Socquard.

"Pretty well, old chap," returned Rigou. "And are Plissoud and Bonnebault, Viollet, and Amaury still the props of your establishment?"

This inquiry, apparently prompted by a good-natured interest, was no random question flung down by a superior to an inferior. When Rigou had nothing else to do, he thought over every trifle, and Fourchon had already pointed out that there was something suspicious in an intimacy between Bonnebault, Plissoud, and Corporal Viollet.

For a few francs lost at play, Bonnebault was quite capable of selling the peasants' secrets to the corporal; or two or three extra bowls of punch might set him babbling when he did not know the importance of his maudlin utterances. But, on the other hand, the old otter-hunter's information might have been counselled by thirst, and Rigou would have paid no attention to it save for the mention of Plissoud. Plissoud was in a position which might inspire him with a notion of thwarting the Aigues conspiracy, if it were merely to make something for himself out of either side.

Plissoud, the clerk of the court, eked out his income with various unremunerative occupations; he was a life insurance agent (these companies having just been started in France),

agent likewise for a society which insured against the chances of conscription; but an unfortunate predilection for billiards and spiced wine was the principal obstacle in his way to fortune. Like Fourchon, he cultivated the art of doing nothing, and waited for a problematical fortune to turn up. Plissoud hated the "best society" of Soulanges profoundly, having measured its power, and Plissoud knew all the ins and outs of Gaubertin's bourgeois tyranny. He scoffed at the moneyed men of Soulanges and Ville-aux-Fayes, and represented the Opposition in a minority of one. As he had neither cash nor credit, he scarcely seemed to be formidable; and Brunet, only too glad to have so contemptible a rival, protected Plissoud for fear that he should sell his practice to some energetic young fellow like Bonnac, for instance, who would compel him to yield up an equal share of the business of the district.

"Business is all right, thanks to them," answered Socquard, "but my spiced wine is being imitated."

"You ought to follow the matter up," said Rigou sententiously.

"I might be led on too far," said the saloon-keeper, innocent of any jocular intention.

"And do your customers get on well together?"

"There is a row now and again; but that is only natural when they play for money."

All heads by this time were looking out of the drawing-room window; Soudry, seeing the father of his daughter-in-law, came out upon the steps to greet him.

"Well, *compère*," cried the ex-sergeant, using the word in its old sense, "is Annette ill that you vouchsafe your presence here of an evening?"

A survival of the gendarme in the mayor prompted him to go straight to the point.

"No," said Rigou, touching the palm which Soudry held out with his own right forefinger; "there is a row on, we will have a talk about it, for our children are concerned—"

Soudry, a fine-looking man, wore a blue suit as though

he still belonged to the force, and a black stock, and spurs to his boots. He took Rigou's arm and led him up to his imposing better-half.

The glass door opened on to the terrace, where the family party were walking up and down enjoying the summer evening. The imaginative reader who has read the previous sketch can picture the glory of the wonderful stretch of country below.

"It is a very long time since we last saw you, my dear Rigou," said Mme. Soudry, taking Rigou's arm to walk out upon the terrace.

"I am so troubled with indigestion," said the old money-lender. "Just look at me, my color is almost as high as yours."

Rigou's appearance on the terrace was, as might be expected, the signal for a salvo of jovial greetings.

"Epicu-rigou! . . . I've found another name for you!" cried the receiver of taxes, holding out a hand, in which Rigou inserted a forefinger.

"Not bad! not bad!" said Sarcus, the little justice of the peace; "he is a bit of a glutton is our lord of Blangy."

"Lord of Blangy!" said Rigou bitterly; "I have not been the cock of my village this long while."

"That is not what the hens say, you rogue you!" said La Soudry, giving Rigou a playful little tap with her fan.

"Are we going on well, my dear sir?" asked the notary, bowing to his principal client.

"Pretty well," said Rigou, and again he held out a forefinger for the lawyer to take.

This habit of Rigou's, which reduced a handshake to the chilliest of demonstrations, was enough in itself to depict the man's whole character to a stranger.

"Look for a corner where we can have a quiet talk," said the monk, singling out Lupin and Mme. Soudry by a glance.

"Let us go back to the drawing-room," said the queen of Soulanges. "These gentlemen," she added, indicat-

ing Dr. Gourdon and Guerbet, are having a discussion on the Q.T."

Mme. Soudry had asked them what they were talking about, and old Guerbet, witty as ever, had replied that they were "having a discussion on the Q.T." Mme. Soudry took this for some scientific expression, and repeated the word with a pretentious air.

"What is the latest news of the Upholsterer?" asked Soudry, and sitting down beside his wife, he put his arm about her waist. Like most elderly women, La Soudry would forgive much for a public demonstration of affection.

"Why, he has gone to the prefecture to demand the enforcement of the penalties, and to ask for support," said Rigou, lowering his voice to set an example of prudence.

"It will be the ruin of him," said Lupin, rubbing his hands. "There will be fighting!"

"Fighting!" repeated Soudry, "that is as may be. If the prefect and the general, who are friends of his, send over a squadron of horse, there will be no fighting. With the gendarmes from Soulanges they might, at a pinch, get the best of it; but as for trying to stand against a charge of cavalry!—"

"Sibilet heard him say something still more dangerous, and that brings me here," Rigou continued.

"Oh! my poor Sophie!" cried Mme. Soudry, taking a sentimental tone, "into what hands the Aigues has fallen! This is what the Revolution has done for us; it has given silk epaulettes to low ruffians! Any one might have known that if you turn a bottle upside down the dregs will come to the top and spoil the wine."

"He means to go to Paris and bring influence to bear on the Keeper of the Seals, so as to make sweeping changes in the Court here."

"Ah!" said Lupin, "then he has seen his danger."

"If they give my son-in-law the appointment of *avocat général*, there is nothing to be said, and the Upholsterer will replace him by some Parisian of his own," Rigou con-

tinued. "If he asks for a seat in the Court for M. Gendrin, and has our examining magistrate Guerbet appointed to be president at Auxerre, he will knock down our ninepins!—He has the gendarmerie for him as it is; if he has the Court to boot, and has counsellors like the Abbe Brossette and Michaud at his side, we shall be nowhere; he might make things very unpleasant for us."

"What! in these five years have you not managed to rid yourselves of the Abbe Brossette?" asked Lupin.

"You do not know him," returned Rigou; "he is as suspicious as a blackbird. That priest is not a man, he never looks at a woman; I cannot see that he has any passion, he is impregnable. Now the General's hot temper lays him open to attack. A man with a weakness is always the servant of his enemies when they can use the handle he gives them. The really strong are those who can keep their vices well in hand, and do not suffer themselves to be mastered by them. The peasants are all right, everything is in working order, but so far we can do nothing against the Abbe. He is like Michaud. Such men are too good to live, the Almighty ought to take them to Himself—"

"We ought to find them servant girls who would put plenty of soap on their stairs," said Mme. Soudry. Rigou gave the almost imperceptible start which a very crafty man makes when he learns a new stratagem.

"The Upholsterer has another weak side; he loves his wife. We might reach him in that way—"

"Let us see," said Mme. Soudry. "We must see first if he carries out his notions."

"What?" cried Lupin; "why, there is the rub!"

"Lupin," said Rigou, taking an authoritative tone, "just go to the prefecture and see the fair Mme. Sarcus this very evening. Arrange matters with her so that her husband shall tell her all that the Upholsterer said and did at the prefecture."

"I should have to spend the night there," returned Lupin.

"So much the better for Money-Sarcus, he will be the

gainer," remarked Rigou, "and Mme. Sarcus is not exactly 'out-of-date' yet."

"Oh! M. Rigou," simpered Mme. Soudry, "is a woman ever 'out-of-date'? "

"You are right as far as that one is concerned. She does not paint before the glass," said Rigou. The exhibition of Mme. Soudry's antiquated charms always filled him with disgust.

Mme. Soudry, who firmly believed that she only wore a mere "suspicion" of rouge, did not feel the sting of the epigram, and asked, "Is it really possible that there are women who paint themselves?"

"As for you, Lupin," Rigou continued, without taking any notice of this artless speech, "go to see friend Gaubertin to-morrow morning when you come back. Tell him that I and my crony here" (slapping Soudry on the thigh) "shall come and eat a crust with him, and ask him for breakfast about noon. Let him know how things are going, so that each of us may turn his ideas over in his mind, for it is a question now of making an end of that accursed Upholsterer. As I was coming here to find you, I said to myself that we must get the Upholsterer into some mess or other, so that the Keeper of the Seals may laugh in his face when he asks for any changes in the Court at Villeaux-Fayes—"

"Hurrah for the Church!" cried Lupin, slapping Rigou on the shoulder.

An idea struck Mme. Soudry at that very moment, an idea which could only have occurred to an opera girl's waiting-maid.

"If we could only attract the Upholsterer over to the Soulanges fair," said she, "and let loose some bewitchingly pretty girl upon him, he might perhaps take up with her, and we could make trouble between him and his wife; she could be told that the cabinetmaker's son had gone back to his old loves—"

"Ah! my beauty," exclaimed Soudry, "there is more

sense in your head than in the whole prefecture of police at Paris!"

"'Tis an idea which proves that Mme. Soudry is as much our queen by intelligence as by beauty," said Lupin, and was rewarded by a grimace which was accepted without protest as a smile by the best society of Soulanges.

"It would be better yet," said Rigou, who had remained thoughtful for some time, "if the thing might be turned to a scandal."

"To have him brought before a magistrate on a criminal charge!" cried Lupin. "Oh, that would be fine!"

"How delightful!" said Soudry artlessly, "to see, for instance, the Comte de Montcornet, Grand Cross of the Legion of Honor, Commander of the Order of St. Louis, and Lieutenant-General, in the Police Court on a charge of indecent—"

"He is too fond of his wife," pronounced Lupin judiciously; "he would never be made to go that length."

"That is no hindrance," said Rigou, "but there is no girl in the district that I see who is fit to turn a saint into a sinner. I am looking out for one for my Abbe."

"What do you say to the beautiful Gatienne Giboulard of Auxerre? Sarcus's son has lost his head over her," suggested Lupin.

"She would be the very one," said Rigou, "only she is of no use for our purpose; she imagines that she has only to show herself to be admired; she is not wily enough. We want a minx with a head on her shoulders. . . . It is all one, she shall come."

"Yes," said Lupin, "the more pretty girls he sees, the greater the chances."

"It will be a very difficult matter to bring the Upholsterer over to the fair. And suppose that he comes, would he go to a dancing saloon like the Tivoli?" queried the ex-sergeant.

"The reason for not going does not hold good this year, dearie," said Mme. Soudry.

"What reason, my beauty?" inquired her spouse.

"The Upholsterer wanted to marry Mlle. de Soulanges," said Lupin; "he was told that she was too young, and he took offence. That is the reason of the coolness between M. de Soulanges and M. de Montcornet, two old friends who both served in the Imperial Guard. They never see each other now. The Upholsterer did not feel inclined to meet them at the fair after that; but they are away from home this year."

As a rule, the Soulanges family spent July, August, September, and October at their country house; but at this particular time the General was in command of the artillery in Spain, under the Duc d'Angoulême, and the Countess had accompanied her husband. At the siege of Cadiz the Count won, as all the world knows, the marshal's bâton which was given him in 1826.

So Montcornet's enemies might well believe that the Aigues would not always stand aloof at the Feast of Our Lady in August, and that it would be easy to induce the Count to come to the Tivoli.

"That is so!" added Lupin.—"Very well, Daddy," he went on, turning to Rigou; "it rests with you to manœuvre matters so that he comes to the fair, and we will bamboozle him nicely."

The Soulanges fair on the 15th of August is one of the special attractions of the town. It is the most important fair for thirty leagues round, eclipsing even those held at the chief town of the department. Ville-aux-Fayes has no fair, for the day of its patron, Saint Sylvester, falls at the end of December.

In August, Soulanges is full of hawkers, and from the 12th to the 15th of August two parallel lines of stalls, wooden framework booths covered with canvas, enliven the usually empty market-place. The fair and festival, which last a fortnight, is as good as a harvest for the little place. It has the authority and prestige of a tradition. Peasants leave the communes, where they are nailed down by their

toil, as old Fourchon put it, to go to the fair at Soulanges. The tempting display of wares and gauds heaped up in the booths on a fair green exercises a periodically renewed fascination over the minds of women and children and peasants all over France. It is the one great spectacle of the year.

So about the 12th of August, the mayor issued placards, countersigned Soudry, which were posted all about the district, in order to secure patronage for the salesmen, acrobats, and prodigies of all kinds, by announcing the duration of the fair and enumerating its principal attractions. These placards, the subject of La Tonsard's inquiries, always ended with the same formula—

"*The Tivoli will be illuminated with colored lamps.*"

The town of Soulanges had, in fact, adopted the flinty garden of the Tivoli as its public ballroom. Soulanges is built upon a rock, and almost all the soil for its gardens is imported.

The stony nature of the soil determines the peculiar flavor of the wine of the district, which is never met with except in the department. Soulanges produces a dry, white, liqueur-like wine, something like Madeira, Vouvray, or Johannisberg, those three *crus* with a strong family resemblance.

Socquard's ball made a prodigious impression on the native imagination, and the whole valley took a pride in its Tivoli. Those who had adventured so far away as Paris said that the Tivoli there was no finer, and only rather larger than the Tivoli of Soulanges; and as for Gaubertin, he boldly avowed that he preferred Socquard's ball to the ball at Paris.

"Let us think all these things over," said Rigou. "That Parisian newspaper editor will very soon weary of his amusements, and, by means of the servants, we might induce the whole party to come over. I will bear the matter in mind. Sibilet (though his credit is falling shockingly

low) might put it into his master's head that this would be a way to curry favor with the multitude."

"Just find out if the fair Countess is cruel to monsieur," said Lupin, for Rigou's benefit. "The trick we are to play off upon him at the Tivoli altogether depends on that."

"That little woman is too much of a Parisienne not to know how to hold with the hare and run with the hounds," said Mme. Soudry.

"Fourchon set his granddaughter Catherine Tonsard on Charles at the Aigues, the Upholsterer's second footman; we shall soon have a pair of ears in the rooms there," said Rigou. "Are you sure of the Abbe Taupin," he added, as he saw the cure enter the room.

"He and the Abbe Mouchon are as much ours as Soudry is mine," said Mme. Soudry, stroking her husband's chin with—"And you are not unhappy, are you, pet?"

"I am counting upon them for a scheme for involving that hypocrite Brossette in a mess," said Rigou in a whisper, as he rose to his feet, "but I am not sure that the fellow-feeling of the cloth will not be too strong for patriotism. You do not know how strong it is. I, for instance, am no fool, but I will not answer for myself if I fall ill. I shall make my peace with the Church no doubt."

"Permit us to hope so," said the cure, for whose benefit Rigou had raised his voice.

"Alas!" said Rigou, "the blunder which I made by my marriage stands in the way of the reconciliation; I cannot murder Mme. Rigou."

"Meanwhile, let us think of the Aigues," said Mme. Soudry.

"Yes," replied the Benedictine. "Do you know, I think that our crony yonder at Ville-aux-Fayes is more than a match for us?—It is in my mind that Gaubertin means to have the Aigues to himself, and that he will take us in," added Rigou.

On his way to Soulanges he had tapped various dark

recesses of the plot with the bâton of prudence, and Gaubertin's portion of it rang hollow.

"Why, the Aigues is not to belong to one, but to all three of us," cried Soudry; "the house must be pulled down from top to bottom."

"I should not be surprised to find a hoard of gold in it, which is all the more reason for pulling it down," said Rigou cunningly.

"Pooh!"

"Yes. During the wars in old times, when the seigneurs were often besieged and surprised, they used to bury their money where they could find it again; and you know that the Marquis of Soulanges-Hautemer, in whom the younger branch expired, was one of the victims of the Biron conspiracy. The lands were confiscated and given to the Comtesse de Moret."

"What a thing it is to know the history of France!" said Soudry. "You are right. It is time that we came to an understanding with Gaubertin."

"And if he tries to play fast and loose," added Rigou, "we will see about putting him in a stew."

"He is rich enough to be honest," remarked Lupin.

"I would answer for him as I would for myself; there is not an honester man in the kingdom," said Mme. Soudry.

"Oh, we believe in his honesty," Rigou began, "but between friends there should be no oversights. By the by, I suspect somebody in Soulanges of trying to put a spoke in our wheel."

"And whom?" inquired Soudry.

"Plissoud."

"*Plissoud!*" cried Soudry, "a poor stick! Brunet has him by the leg, and his wife keeps his head in the manger. You ask Lupin!"

"What can he do?" asked Lupin.

"He means to open Montcornet's eyes," said Rigou; "he means to use Montcornet's influence to get himself a place—"

"It would never bring him in as much as his wife does at Soulanges," said Mme. Soudry.

"He tells his wife everything when he is drunk," remarked Lupin; "we should know in time."

"The fair Mme. Plissoud has no secrets from *you*," said Rigou in reply to this; "we can be easy, never mind."

"Besides," said Mme. Soudry, "she is as stupid as she is handsome. I would not change places with her. If I were a man, I should prefer a woman who was plain, but clever, to a pretty woman who could not say 'Two.'"

The notary bit his lips. "Oh! she can set other people saying 'Three,'" said he.

"Coxcomb!" called Rigou, on his way to the door.

"Well," said Soudry, as he went out with his crony, "we shall meet again early to-morrow morning."

"I will call for you.—Oh! by the by, Lupin," he added, turning to the notary, who had left the room to order his horse, "try to find out through Mme. Sarcus anything that our Upholsterer may contrive against us at the prefecture."

"If she cannot find out, who will?" asked Lupin.

Rigou looked at Lupin with a knowing smile. "Pardon me," he said, "they are such a lot of noodles in there that I was forgetting that there was one clever man among them."

"Indeed, I wonder myself how it is that I have not grown rusty," said Lupin artlessly.

"Is it true that Soudry has engaged a housemaid?"

"Why, yes," said Lupin, "a week ago. His worship the mayor had a mind to bring out his wife's merits by force of contrast with a little chit of a Burgundian peasant, the age of an old ox. How he manages with Mme. Soudry we cannot guess as yet, for he has the impudence to go very early to bed."

"I will see into that to-morrow," said the village Sardanapalus, forcing a smile, and with that the two profound schemers shook hands and parted.

Rigou, cautious soul, had no wish to be benighted on his way home, in spite of his new-born popularity. "Get along,

citizen!" he called to his horse, a joke which this son of the Revolution never forgot to cut at the expense of the Revolution. The bitterest reactionaries are always to be found among those raised on high by a popular upheaval.

"Old Rigou pays short visits," said Gourdon the registrar, addressing Mme. Soudry.

"Short but sweet," the lady replied.

"Like his life," said the doctor, "that man is immoderate in all things."

"So much the better," said Soudry. "My son will come into his property the sooner."

"Did he bring any news from the Aigues?" asked the cure.

"Yes, my dear Abbe," said Mme. Soudry. "Those people are the scourge of the countryside. How Mme. de Montcornet, who is at any rate a lady by birth, should not understand her interests better, I cannot conceive!"

"And yet they have a model before their eyes," said the cure.

"Who can you mean?" simpered Mme. Soudry.

"The Soulanges—"

"Oh!—Yes," added the queen, after a pause.

"Here am I, worse luck!" cried Mme. Vermut, as she came into the room, "and without my neutralizing agent; though Vermut is too neutral where I am concerned to be called an 'agent' of any kind—"

Soudry, standing beside Guerbet, saw the basket-chaise stop before the Tivoli. "What the devil is that blessed Rigou after?" he exclaimed. "The old tiger-cat never takes a step in vain."

"Blessed is just the word for a Benedictine," said the stout receiver of taxes.

"He is going into the Cafe de la Paix!" cried Dr. Gourdon.

"Keep cool," said his brother; "he is distributing benedictions with closed fists, for you can hear them yelping inside at this distance."

"That Cafe," began the cure, "is like the temple of Janus. It used to be called the Cafe de la Guerre in the time of the Emperor, and the place was as peaceful as could be; the most respectable people used to go there for a friendly chat—"

"He calls that chatting!" broke in Sarcus. "Ye gods! what conversation was it that produced a little Bournier!"

"—but since the house was called the Cafe de la Paix, in honor of the Bourbons, there is a brawl there every day," pursued the Abbe, finishing the sentence which the justice took the liberty of interrupting. The cure's joke, like quotations from the "Bilboquéide," came up very frequently.

"Which is as much as to say that Burgundy will always be the land of fisticuffs," said Guerbet.

"That remark of yours is not so far wrong," said the cure; "it is pretty much the history of our country."

"I do not know the history of France," cried Soudry; "but before I begin upon it, I should dearly like to know why Rigou went into the Cafe just now with Socquard."

"Oh," said the cure, "it was on no charitable errand, you may rest assured of that."

"It makes my flesh creep to look at that man," said Mme. Vermut.

"He is so much to be feared," the doctor said, "that I should not feel safe even after he were dead if he had a grudge against me; he is just the man to get up out of his coffin to play you some ugly trick."

"If there is any one on earth who can send the Upholsterer over here on the 15th and take him in some trap, Rigou is the man to do it," said the mayor in his wife's ear.

"Especially if Gaubertin and you, dearie, have a hand in it too—" she began aloud.

"There! what was I saying just now," exclaimed Guerbet, nudging M. Sarcus's elbow; "he has picked up some pretty girl at Socquard's, and is putting her into his chaise—"

"Until—" put in the poet.

"There is one for you, whose speech is without ill intent," cried Guerbet, interrupting him.

"You are wrong, gentlemen," said Mme. Soudry. "M. Rigou is thinking only of our interests; for, if I am not mistaken, that girl is one of Tonsard's daughters."

"Laying in a stock of vipers, like an apothecary," cried Guerbet.

"Any one would think, to hear you talk, that you had seen our apothecary, M. Vermut," said Dr. Gourdon, indicating the little man as he crossed the market-place.

"Poor old boy!" said the doctor's brother (suspected of distilling the volatile elixir of wit in the company of the apothecary's wife). "Just see how he waddles along! . . . And he is supposed to be a scientific man!"

"But for him," said the justice, "it would be a puzzle to know what to do about post-mortems. He discovered the traces of poison in poor Pigeron's body so cleverly that the chemists from Paris said in the Court at Auxerre that they could not have done it better—"

"He found nothing at all," said Soudry; "but, as President Gendrin says, it is just as well that people should believe that poison is always found out."

"Mme. Pigeron did wisely to leave Auxerre," said Mme. Vermut. "She is a weak-minded thing, and a wicked woman," she added. "As if there were not sure and harmless methods of keeping a husband in order without having recourse to drugs to get rid of the genus. I should very much like any man to say anything against my conduct. M. Vermut, worthy man, is scarcely ever in my way, and he has never been ill; and look at Mme. de Montcornet, how she goes on, in her chalets and hermitages and what not, with that journalist whom she brought from Paris at her own charges; she fondles him under the General's nose."

"At her own charges?" cried Mme. Soudry. "Is that a fact? If we could have proof of that, what a pretty subject for an anonymous letter to the General—"

"The General—" said Mme. Vermut, "why, you would put a stop to nothing, the Upholsterer follows his calling."

"What is that, dear?" inquired Mme. Soudry.

"Why—he furnishes the bedroom."

"If Pigeron, poor fellow, instead of worrying his wife, had had the sense to do the same, he would be living yet," said the registrar.

Mme. Soudry leaned toward her neighbor, M. Guerbet of Conches, and administered to him one of the monkey's grimaces, inherited (as she imagined) from her late mistress; as if that mistress's smiles, like her silver plate, were hers now by right of conquest. She redoubled her dose as she indicated Mme. Vermut, who was flirting with the poet of the "Bilboqueide."

"How vulgar that woman is! What things she says, and what a way to behave! I do not know whether I can allow her to frequent our society any longer—especially when M. Gourdon the poet is here."

"There is social morality summed up for you!" said the cure, who hitherto had not spoken. He had watched the whole scene, and none of it was lost upon him.

After this epigram, or rather this social satire, so pithy and so true that it went home to every one present, a game of boston was proposed.

Is not this a true picture of life in every latitude of the "world," as we agree to call it? The language is different, it is true, but are not the very same things, nor more nor less, said in the most richly gilded salons in Paris?

III

THE CAFÉ DE LA PAIX

IT WAS ABOUT seven o'clock in the evening when Rigou passed by the Cafe de la Paix. The slanting rays of the sunset steeped the whole picturesque village in glorious red, and raised a riot of flaming color in its window-panes, calling up the strangest and most improbable hues to contrast with the clear mirror surface of the lake.

The deep schemer, brooding over the plots that he was weaving, allowed his horse to go at a foot-pace; so that as he went slowly past the cafe, he heard his own name hurled at somebody in the course of one of the brawls which had, according to the Cure Taupin, produced a violent contrast between the name of the house and the chronic condition of strife within it.

It is necessary, for the sake of clearness, to enter into detail concerning the topography of this land of Cocagne. It lay in the angle formed by the road with the market-place; on this latter side it was bounded by the cafe itself, and along the side of the road by the famous Tivoli, which was intended to be the scene of one of the episodes in the conspiracy against Montcornet.

The house was built after the fashion of Rigou's parsonage. Three ground-floor windows looked upon the road, and in the front, a glass entrance door, with a window on either side of it, gave upon the market-place. There was another door at the side which gave admittance to the back yard, by way of a narrow passage which separated the cafe from the next house, where Vallet, the Soulanges haberdasher, lived. The whole building, the green shutters only

excepted, was painted a bright yellow. It was one of the few houses in the little town which could boast of two stories and an attic floor, and had been so built for the following reasons.

In days before Ville-aux-Fayes attained its present amazing prosperity, and Soulanges was the principal place in the bailiwick, people who came on judicial business, or visitors for whom there was no room at the chateau, used to occupy the first-floor rooms, four apartments provided with a bed apiece, and just sufficient necessaries to justify the appellation of "furnished lodgings"; but for the past twenty-five years their only occupants had been acrobats, itinerant quacks, hawkers, and commercial travellers. At fair time the rooms let for four francs a day, and Socquard's four apartments brought him some three hundred francs, to say nothing of the increase of custom to his cafe.

The front of the house in the market-place was adorned with paintings specially designed for it. In the wall-space on either side of the door you beheld billiard cues inter twined with love-knots, and, above the loops of ribbon, steaming punch-bowls shaped like Greek drinking cups. The words CAFÉ DE LA PAIX blazed in yellow on a green background, with a pyramid of billiard-balls, red, white, and blue, at either end. The window-sashes, painted green, contained small squares of cheap glass.

Half a score of arbor vitæ shrubs in boxes (some one ought to rename the plants the "Cafe tree") stood on either side the entrance door, a row of pretentious failures in vegetable life. The awnings, such as shopkeepers use in Paris and other great cities to screen their wares from the sun, were luxuries unknown in Soulanges; so each bottle in the window fulfilled the functions of a chemist's flask, for its contents were periodically recooked inside it. The lens-shaped bosses on the window panes caught the rays of the sun like burning glasses, set the wines, liqueurs, and syrups boiling, and stewed the plums and cherries in the brandy. So great was the heat that Aglaé, her father, and the waiter were driven

of an afternoon to take refuge on the benches outside, under the feeble shadow of the luckless shrubs which Mlle. Socquard sprinkled with tepid water. There were days when all three—father, daughter, and waiter—lay stretched out like domestic animals, fast asleep.

The interior of the cafe had been papered in 1804 with scenes from the romance of "Paul et Virginie," then in vogue. You beheld negroes cultivating coffee, which thus, at any rate, could be found on the wall-paper, if nowhere else, in an establishment where scarce a score of cups were called for in a month. Colonial products entered so little into ordinary life at Soulanges that Socquard would have been at his wits' end if a stranger had asked for chocolate. The beverage would, however, have been forthcoming, and the customer would have been supplied with a nauseous brown broth produced by boiling one of the tablets sold for two sous by country grocers, an adulterated compound containing more starch, raw sugar, and pounded almonds than either genuine cocoa or sugar, and fabricated to ruin the trade in Spanish chocolate.

As to the coffee, Father Socquard simply boiled it in a large pipkin known in most households as "the big brown pot." He dropped in the mixture of powder and chicory, and, with intrepidity which a Parisian waiter might have envied, served up the decoction forthwith in an earthenware cup which had nothing to dread from a fall on the floor.

Sugar was still regarded in Soulanges with a reverence which dated from the days of the Empire; Aglaé Socquard courageously brought out four whole lumps of sugar as large as hazel nuts with a cup of coffee for an itinerant hawker who had taken it into his head to call for that beverage of the man of letters.

There had been no change in the cafe since the day when all Soulanges flocked to admire the new bewitching wall decoration of gilt-framed mirrors alternating with brass hat-pegs, the counter painted to resemble mahogany, the reddish

marble slab, with its gleaming plated vessels, and Argand lamps, stated by rumor to be Gaubertin's gift to that fine woman Mme. Socquard. Everything was besmeared with a soft, sticky compound, which can only be compared to the surface of old pictures which have lain forgotten in a lumber room.

Suspended by a chain from the ceiling hung an Argand lamp adorned with cut-glass drops, and provided with a globe-shaped oil reservoir which fed two separate wicks; the tables were painted to resemble marble, the seats upholstered with crimson Utrecht velvet—all these things had contributed to make the reputation of the Cafe de la Guerre.

Thither, from 1802 till 1804, the townspeople of Soulanges repaired to play at dominoes or *brelan*, and to partake of glasses of liqueur or spiced wine, with brandied fruits and biscuits; for colonial produce was so dear that coffee, chocolate, and sugar were out of the question. Punch, like *bavaroise*, was a great delicacy, and compounded with some strange, ropy, sweetening substance not unlike treacle: the name has been lost, but the substance made the inventor's fortune.

This concise account will suffice to conjure up similar pictures in the memories of those who have travelled in the provinces; and others who have never left Paris can form some dim idea of the smoke-begrimed ceiling of the Cafe de la Paix, and its mirrors dimmed with myriads of dark specks to bear witness to the independence of the dipterous tribes of Burgundy.

Socquard's wife, a beauty, who in the matter of gallant adventures surpassed La Tonsard of the Grand-I-Vert, had once queened it there, dressed in the latest fashion. She affected the sultana's turban, for in the days of the Empire the "sultana" enjoyed the vogue of the "angel" of the present day.

The whole feminine world of the valley repaired to Soulanges to copy the beauty's turbans, poke-bonnets, furred caps, and *coiffures chinoises*. All the bigwigs of Soulanges

were laid under contribution for these splendors. During the period of the short-waisted gowns which our mothers wore in the pride of their Imperial graces, Junie (for her name was Junie!) founded the house of Socquard; her husband owed to her a vineyard, the house in which they lived, and the Tivoli. It was said that M. Lupin's father did reckless things for handsome Junie Socquard; it was certain that she presented Gaubertin (his successor) with little Bournier.

These little matters, and the mysterious skill with which Socquard compounded his spiced wine, would be sufficient in themselves to account for the popularity of the cafe; but there were, besides, plenty of contributory causes. Wine, and wine only, could be obtained at the Grand-I-Vert or at any of the little taverns in the valley, but at Socquard's cafe there were liqueurs and foreign wines and fruits in brandy. It was the only place between Conches and Ville-aux-Fayes, and for six leagues round, where you could play a game of billiards, and nowhere else would you find such admirable punch. So the valley rang almost daily with the fame of a cafe associated with every idea of the utmost refinement of luxury for these people whose sensibility resided in their stomachs rather than in their hearts. Add to these reasons yet another. All who frequented the place felt that it was a privilege to form an integral part of the Soulanges festival.

The Cafe de la Paix fulfilled the same end as the Grand-I-Vert, but in a town and in a sphere immediately above that of the tavern. It was a storehouse of poison, a half-way house for gossip between Ville-aux-Fayes and the valley. The Grand-I-Vert supplied the cafe with milk and cream, and Tonsard's daughters were in constant communication with the latter establishment.

For Socquard the market square of Soulanges was an appurtenance of his cafe. Hercules-Socquard went from door to door, chatting with one and another, wearing for all costume a pair of trousers and an imperfectly buttoned waistcoat, after the manner of country barkeepers. The folk with

whom he chatted gave him warning if any one happened to enter his establishment, and he returned thither laggingly and, as it were, reluctant.

These details should suffice to convince the Parisian who has never stirred from Paris that it would be difficult—let us go further, and say that it would be impossible—to conceal the most trifling matter in the whole valley of the Avonne from Conches to Ville-aux-Fayes. There is no breach of continuity in country districts. There are taverns like the Grand-I-Vert and Cafe de la Paix dotted about from place to place to catch and echo every sound. Matters which possess absolutely no interest for anybody, accomplished, to boot, in the strictest privacy, are bruited abroad by a sort of witchcraft. Gossip fulfils the functions of the electric telegraph, and by such apparatus evil tidings are borne prodigious distances in the twinkling of an eye.

Rigou checked his horse, alighted, and made the bridle fast to one of the door-posts at the Tivoli. Next he discovered a plausible pretext for listening to the dispute by seating himself between two of the windows, in such a position that if he stretched his neck a little he could see the persons within and watch their movements, while at the same time he could hear the coarse words which shook the windows, and remain outside in perfect quiet.

"And if I were to tell old Rigou that your brother Nicolas has a grudge against La Pechina, and is always on the watch for her," shouted a shrill voice, "and that she will slip away under your seigneur's hands, he would soon tear the tripes out of the lot of you such as you are; a pack of scoundrels at the Grand-I-Vert!"

"And if you play us such a trick, Aglaé," yelled Marie Tonsard, "I'll do that to you which you will never tell to any but the worms in your coffin. Don't you meddle in Nicolas's affairs, nor yet in mine with Bonnebault!"

Marie, urged by her grandmother, had followed Bonnebault on a spy's errand. Through the window at which Rigou had stationed himself she had seen Bonnebault dis-

playing his airs and graces for Mlle. Socquard, who felt bound to smile on a customer in return for his sufficiently agreeable compliments. That smile had brought on the tempestuous scene and a lightning flash of a revelation of no small value to Rigou.

"Well, Father Rigou, are *you* helping to wear out my premises?" It was Socquard's voice, and he clapped the money-lender on the shoulder.

The saloon-keeper had just returned from an outhouse at the end of the garden, whence such machinery as whirligigs, see-saws, and weighing machines were being brought out to be put in their places in the Tivoli for the delectation of the public. Socquard had come up noiselessly, for he was shod with the cheap yellow leather slippers which are sold in such quantities in the provinces.

"If you had fresh lemons, I would take a glass of lemonade," said Rigou in answer; "it is hot this evening."

"But who is there squalling inside in such a way?" asked Socquard, and looking through the window, he beheld his daughter and Marie at close quarters.

"They are fighting for Bonnebault," said Rigou, with a sardonic glance.

Socquard choked down a father's annoyance in the interests of the saloon-keeper. The saloon-keeper thought it the more prudent course to follow Rigou's example and listen to the sounds from without; while the father in him yearned to enter and declare that Bonnebault, though full of estimable qualities as a customer, was absolutely worthless considered as the son-in-law of a Soulanges notable. Yet, Father Socquard had received but few offers of marriage for his daughter. The girl was twenty-two years old, and in height, weight, and size she rivalled Mme. Vermichel, whose activity was a standing marvel. A life behind a counter appeared to have developed a tendency to corpulence, which Aglaé inherited from her father.

"What the devil has got the girls?" inquired Socquard of his neighbor.

"Oh," said the Benedictine, "'tis a devil which the Church has caught more often than any other."

For all answer Socquard fell to examining the painted billiard cues on the wall between the windows. Patches of plaster had dropped away, till the beholder was puzzled to understand how they had once been bound together.

At that very moment Bonnebault issued from the billiard-room, cue in hand, and struck Marie smartly on the shoulder.

"You have made me miss my stroke," he cried, "but I shall not miss you, and I shall keep on until you clap a stopper on your gab."

Socquard and Rigou thought it time to interfere. Both of them went inside, and immediately, with a sound as of the distant practice of a drum corps, there arose such a swarm of flies that the room was darkened. After the first alarm, however, the cloud of huge blue-bottles and blood-thirsty smaller brethren, with a gadfly or two among them, settled down again among a regiment of sticky-looking bottles on a triple row of shelves so black with specks that the paint beneath was quite invisible.

Marie was crying. To be beaten by the man she loves beneath the eyes of a rival is a humiliation which no woman will endure, no matter what her position in the social scale.

Indeed, the lower her rank, the more violent the expression of her hatred. Marie Tonsard saw neither Socquard nor Rigou. She sank upon a seat in gloomy and ferocious silence. The old Benedictine eyed her curiously.

"Aglae," said Socquard, "go and find a fresh lemon, and rinse a wineglass yourself."

"You did wisely to send your daughter away," said Rigou in a low voice; "she might perhaps have been killed in another moment," and he glanced significantly at Marie Tonsard's hand. She had caught up a stool, and was about to hurl it at Aglae's head.

"Come, come! Marie," said old Socquard, stepping in front of her, "people do not come here to fling stools about,

and if you were to break my glasses there would be a bill which you would not pay me in cow's milk—"

"Father Socquard, your daughter is a reptile. I am every bit as good as she is, do you hear! If you do not want Bonnebault for a son-in-law, it is time that you told him to go and play billiards somewhere else; he is losing five francs every minute—"

At the first outburst of a flood of words, which were shrieked aloud rather than spoken, Socquard took Marie by the waist and flung her out at the door in spite of her cries and struggles. He was not a moment too soon; Bonnebault came out of the billiard-room for the second time, his eyes ablaze.

"It shall not end like this!" screamed Marie Tonsard.

"You! bow yourself out!" yelled Bonnebault (Viollet had thrown his arms about him to prevent violence). "Be off! or I will never speak to you nor look at you again."

"*You!*" cried Marie, glancing at Bonnebault with fury in her eyes. "Give me back my money first, and I will leave you to Mademoiselle Socquard, if she is rich enough to keep you—"

At this point Marie was frightened, for she saw that Hercules-Socquard could scarcely master Bonnebault, and with a tigress' spring she fled out into the road.

Rigou put Marie into his chaise to hide her from the furious Bonnebault, whose voice reached the Soudrys' house across the square; then, when Marie was hidden away, he returned for his glass of lemonade, examining meanwhile the group formed by Plissoud, Amaury, Viollet, and the waiter, who were all endeavoring to calm Bonnebault.

"Come, hussar! it is your turn," said Amaury, a short, fair-haired, blear-eyed young man.

"And besides, she has gone away," said Viollet.

If ever surprise was expressed on human countenance, it was visible in Plissoud's face when he discovered that the usurer of Blangy, sitting at one of the tables while the quarrel went on, was paying more attention to him, Plissoud, than

to the two girls. The Clerk of the Court was thrown off his guard, his face wore the peculiar startled look that a man wears when he comes suddenly on another man against whom he is plotting. He went abruptly back to the billiard-room.

"Good-day, Father Socquard," said Rigou.

"I will bring your carriage round," said Socquard; "take your time."

"How could one get to know what they say over their billiards?" said Rigou to himself; and just then he saw the waiter's face in the looking-glass.

The waiter was a man-of-all-work. He pruned Socquard's vines, swept out the cafe and billiard saloon, kept the garden in order, and watered the floor of the Tivoli, and all for the sum of sixty francs per annum. He never wore a jacket save on great occasions; his costume consisted of a pair of blue linen trousers, heavy shoes, and a striped velvet waistcoat, with the addition of a coarse homespun apron when on duty in the cafe or billiard-room. Those apron strings were his insignia of office. Socquard hired the young fellow at the last fair; for in that valley, and all over Burgundy for that matter, servants are hired by the year, and come to the hiring fair exactly like horses.

"What is your name?" asked Rigou.

"Michel, at your service," the lad answered.

"Does Daddy Fourchon come here now and again?"

"Two or three times a week with M. Vermichel. M. Vermichel gives me a few sous for letting him know when his wife is going to pounce in upon him."

"He is a good man, is Daddy Fourchon; he has had some education, and has plenty of common-sense," said Rigou, and he paid for his lemonade, and left the stale-smelling room as Socquard brought the chaise round to the door.

Rigou had just taken his seat when he saw the apothecary, and hailed him with, "Hallo! M. Vermut!" Vermut looked up, and seeing Rigou, hastened toward him. Rigou stepped down again, and said in Vermut's ear, "Do you know whether

there is any irritant which can destroy the skin and induce disease—say a whitlow on the finger, for instance?"

"If M. Gourdon undertakes it, yes," said the man of drugs.

"Vermut, not a word of this to any one, if you do not want us to fall out. But tell M. Gourdon about it, and tell him to come to see me, the day after to-morrow, and I will give him a forefinger to amputate—it will be rather a delicate job."

And with that the ex-mayor stepped into his chaise beside Marie Tonsard, leaving the little apothecary dumfounded.

"Well, little viper," said Rigou, laying a hand on the girl's arm, after fastening the reins to a ring on the leather apron which covered them in. "So you think you will keep Bonnebault by giving way to temper like this, do you? If you were wise, you would help on his marriage with that big lump of stupidity, and then you could take your revenge."

Marie could not help smiling as she answered, "Oh! what a bad man you are! You are our master, and that is the truth."

"Listen, Marie; I am a friend to the peasants, but I cannot have one of you come and put himself between my teeth and a mouthful of game. Your brother Nicolas, as Aglae said, is waylaying La Pechina. It is not right, for the child is under my protection; she is down in my will for thirty thousand francs, and I mean her to make a good match. I know that Nicolas, with your sister Catherine to help him, all but killed the poor child this morning; you will see your brother and sister, tell them this—'If you let La Pechina alone, Father Rigou will save Nicolas from the conscription—'"

"You are the Devil himself," cried Marie. "People say that you have signed a compact with him. Is it possible?"

"Yes," said Rigou, with gravity.

"They used to say so at 'upsittings,' but I did not believe them."

"The Devil promised that no attempts upon my life should

succeed; that I should never be robbed; that I should live for a hundred years without an illness; that I should succeed in everything that I undertook, and until the hour of my death I should be as young as a two-year cockerel—"

"As you certainly are," said Marie. "Well, then, it is *devilish* easy for you to save my brother from the army—"

"If he has a mind; for he will have to lose a finger, that is all," said Rigou. "I will tell him how."

"Why, you are taking the upper road!" said Marie.

"I never go the other way of a night," said the unfrocked monk.

"Because of the Crucifix?" queried Marie artlessly.

"That is just it, cunning girl!" returned the diabolical personage.

They were reaching a spot where the road lay in a hollow, a cutting through a furrow in the land, with a tolerably steep bank rising on either side such as you often see on French cross-country roads. On the hither side of this hollow the road forked to Cerneux and Ronquerolles, and in the angle of the fork a Crucifix stood. Any one standing on either bank might fire on his man to a certainty, for he could almost clap the muzzle in the passenger's face; and this was the more easy, since that the slopes behind were covered with vines, and there were chance-sown brambles and bushes on the bank which afforded cover. It may be guessed, therefore, why the usurer, with unfailing prudence, never went that way at night. The Thune flows round the base of the little hill which they call the Cross Green. Never was there a spot better adapted for murder and vengeance, for the Ronquerolles road runs down to the bridge over the Avonne by the hunting lodge, and the road to Cerneux crosses the high-road in such a sort that the murderer would practically have a choice of four roads, and might fly in the direction of the Aigues, or Ville-aux-Fayes, or Ronquerolles, or Cerneux, and leave his pursuers in perplexity as to the way he had taken.

"I will set you down just outside the village," said Rigou, when they came in sight of the first houses of Blangy.

"Because of Annette, you old coward!" cried Marie. "Are you going to send that girl away soon? You have had her for three years. . . . What amuses me is that your old woman is so well. God avenges Himself."

IV

THE TRIUMVIRATE OF VILLE-AUX-FAYES

THE PRUDENT money-lender had made a law that his wife and Jean should sleep between sunset and sunrise, proving to them that the house would never be robbed while he himself sat up till midnight and lay late. Not only had he secured the house to himself between the hours of seven in the evening and five in the morning, but he accustomed both wife and man to respect his slumbers and those of the Hagar whose room lay beyond his own.

So the next morning about half-past six, Mme. Rigou came and knocked timidly at her husband's door. (With Jean's aid she had already looked after the poultry.) "M. Rigou," she said, "you asked me to call you."

The sound of the woman's voice, her bearing, and the way in which she obeyed an order, quaking all the while lest her very obedience should be taken amiss, showed the utter immolation of the poor creature to her ingenious petty tyrant and her affection for him.

"All right!" cried Rigou.

"Is Annette to be wakened too?"

"No. Let her sleep on. She has been up all night," he answered gravely. The man was always serious even when he indulged in a joke. As a matter of fact, Annette had secretly opened the door to Sibilet, Fourchon, and Catherine Tonsard, all of whom came at different times between eleven and one o'clock that morning.

Ten minutes later, Rigou came downstairs. He was

dressed more carefully than usual, and greeted his wife with a "Good morning, old woman," which made her prouder than she would have been to see a Montcornet at her feet.

"Jean," said Rigou, addressing the lay-brother, "don't leave the house. Don't let them rob me; you would lose more by it than I."

It was by mingling kindness, and rebuffs, and hope, and hard words, in this way, that the learned egoist had broken in his three slaves to a dog-like fidelity and attachment.

Again Rigou took the upper road to avoid the Cross Green, and reached the market place of Soulanges about eight o'clock. He had just made the reins fast to the nearest post by the flight of steps, when a shutter was put back, and Soudry exhibited his countenance. Two small, black eyes gave a cunning expression to a face seamed by the small-pox.

"Let us begin by breaking a crust together," he said, "for we shall not get breakfast at Ville-aux-Fayes before one o'clock."

He called under his breath to a damsel as young and pretty as Rigou's servant. The girl came noiselessly down the stairs; he bade her bring a piece of ham and some bread, and went himself to the cellar for wine.

For the thousandth time Rigou contemplated the parlor; the oak wainscot that rose to elbow height, the moldings on the ceiling, the spacious handsomely painted cupboards, the neat stove, and the magnificent timepiece which once belonged to Mlle. Laguerre. The backs of the chairs were lyre-shaped; the woodwork painted white and varnished; the seats were of green morocco with gilded nail-heads. The massive mahogany table was covered with green oilcloth, scored with dark lines, and bound with green binding. The pains which Urbain bestowed on the polishing of the parquetry floor attested the fact that his mistress had herself been a domestic servant.

"Pshaw!" said Rigou to himself. "This kind of thing costs too much. One can eat just as comfortably in my

room at home, and I save the interest on the money laid out in this useless show.—Why, where is Mme. Soudry?" he inquired, as the mayor of Soulanges came in with a venerable bottle in his hand.

"She is asleep."

"And you do not disturb her slumbers much," said Rigou.

The old gendarme winked facetiously, and indicated the ham which the pretty Jeannette was bringing in.

"A nice morsel like that wakes you up," he said, "home cured! We only cut into it yesterday."

"I would not have thought it of you, old chum; where did you pick her up?" asked the old monk, lowering his voice for Soudry's ear.

"Like the ham," said the gendarme, with another wink, "she has been in the house for a week."

Jeannette still wore her nightcap, and had thrust her bare feet into her slippers. She wore a short petticoat, and the straps of her bodice were passed over her shoulders in peasant fashion; the crossed folds of a bandanna handkerchief could not altogether hide her fresh and youthful charms, altogether she looked no less appetizing than the ham vaunted by Soudry. She was plump and short. The mottled red of the bare arms that hung by her side, the large dimpled hands and short fingers shapely fashioned at the tips, all spoke of high health. Add to this a face of a thoroughly Burgundian type, ruddy, but white at the temples, ears, and throat; chestnut hair, eyes which turned slightly upward at the outer corners; wide nostrils, a sensual mouth, and a trace of down upon the cheeks. With a lively expression tempered by a deceptive demureness, she was the very model of a roguish servant girl.

"Upon my word, Jeannette *is* like the ham," declared Rigou. "If I had not an Annette, I should like a Jeannette."

"One is as good as the other," said Soudry, "for your Annette is fair, and soft, and delicate.—How is Mme. Rigou?

Is she asleep?" Soudry resumed abruptly, to show Rigou that he understood the jest.

"She wakes at cock-crow," said Rigou, "but she goes to roost with the hens. I stay up myself and read the 'Constitutionnel.' Evening and morning my wife lets me doze; she would not come into the room for the world—"

"Here it is just the other way," put in Jeannette. "The mistress sits up with company and plays at cards; there are sometimes fifteen of them in the drawing-room. The master goes off to bed at eight, and we get up at daybreak—"

"It looks different to you," said Rigou, "but it comes to the same thing in the end. Well, my dear, you come to me, and I will send Annette here. It will be the same thing, with a difference."

"Old scoundrel," said Soudry, "you will make her blush!"

"Eh, gendarme! so you only want one horse in your stable? After all, every one takes his luck where he finds it."

Jeannette, in obedience to her master's order, went to put out his clothes.

"You promised to marry her when your wife dies, I suppose?" asked Rigou.

"It is the only way at our age," said Soudry.

"If the girls had ambition, it would be a short cut to widower's estate," returned Rigou; "more particularly, if Jeannette heard Mme. Soudry mention her way of soaping the stairs."

Both husbands grew thoughtful at this. When Jeannette came to announce that all was in readiness, Soudry took her away with him, with a "Come and help me," which drew a smile from the unfrocked monk.

"There is a difference after all," said he; "I should not be afraid to leave him with Annette."

Fifteen minutes after, Soudry, dressed in his best, stepped into the basket-chaise, and the pair went round by the lake on the way to Ville-aux-Fayes.

"And how about yonder château?" asked Rigou, as they caught a glimpse of the end of the manor-house. The stress which the old Jacobin gave to the word "château" revealed the hatred of the great châteaux and great estates which small proprietors cherish in their souls.

"Why, I am sure, I hope it will stand for my lifetime," said Soudry. "The Comte de Soulanges was my general; he has done me a good turn; he managed my pension nicely, and then he allows Lupin to manage his estate, and Lupin's father made a fortune by managing it. There will be another to come after Lupin, and so long as there are Counts of Soulanges the place will be respected.—They are a good sort, they live and let live—"

"Ah! but the General has three children, and perhaps after his death they will not agree. Some day or other the sons and the son-in-law will sell the place, and that mine of lead and old iron will be sold to shopkeepers, whom we will contrive to squeeze."

The château of Soulanges seemed to defy the unfrocked monk.

"Ah! yes, they used to build solidly in those times!" exclaimed Soudry. "But M. de Soulanges is economizing at this moment so as to entail the Soulanges estate; it is to go with the title—"

"Entails fall through," said Rigou.

When the theme was exhausted, the pair fell to discussing the merits of their respective domestics in a Burgundian dialect, a trifle too broad to print. This never-failing topic lasted them till they reached Gaubertin's headquarters. Even the most impatient reader may perhaps feel sufficient curiosity on the subject of Ville-aux-Fayes to excuse a brief digression.

It is an odd-sounding word, but it is easily explained. It is a corruption of the Low Latin *villa-in-fago*, the manor in the woods. The name is sufficient to tell us that a forest formerly covered the delta of the Avonne which flows five leagues away into the Yonne. Doubtless, it was a Frank who built a stronghold on the ridge which thereabout makes

a detour, and slopes gradually down into the strip of plain where Leclercq the deputy had bought an estate. The conqueror made a broad and long moat, and so intrenched himself in the delta. His was a strong position, and, for a feudal lord, an extremely convenient one for the collection of tolls and pontage on the bridges by which all wayfarers must pass, and grinding dues at the water-mills.

Such is the history of the first beginnings of Ville-aux-Fayes. Every feudal stronghold or religious settlement attracted residents about it, to form the nucleus of a town at a later day when the place was in a position to create or develop an industry, or to attract business. Jean Rouvet's invention of water-carriage for timber, requiring wharves in places suitable for intercepting the floating piles, was the making of Ville-aux-Fayes, then a mere village in comparison with Soulanges. Ville-aux-Fayes became the headquarters of the trade in the timber which was grown along both streams for a distance of twelve miles. Workmen flocked to Ville-aux-Fayes, for many hands were needed to build up the piles which the Yonne carries into the Seine, besides the salvage and recovery of "stray" rafts. This working population supplied consumers of produce and stimulated trade. So it came to pass that Ville-aux-Fayes, which numbered scarce six hundred inhabitants at the end of the sixteenth century, in 1790 had a population of two thousand, which had doubled since Gaubertin came to the place. This is how it was brought about.

When the Legislative Assembly reconstituted the electoral divisions, Ville-aux-Fayes, on account of its geographical position, was selected as the seat of local government, to the exclusion of Soulanges. The position of Ville-aux-Fayes marked it out for a sub-prefecture, and a sub-prefecture entailed a Court of First Instance, and the hierarchy of officials required by both institutions. With the increase of population in Paris there began to be an increase in the demand for fuel, prices rose, and Ville-aux-Fayes grew more important with the development of its trade. Gaubertin's

second start in life had been determined by foresight; he felt sure that Paris would grow with the peace; and, in fact, the population increased by one-third between 1815 and 1825.

The configuration of Ville-aux-Fayes is determined by the lay of the land. Wharves line either side of the promontory. Above the town and below the hillside covered with the Forest of Soulanges, a bar has been made across the river to stop the floating timber; and here the outskirts of Ville-aux-Fayes begin. The lower town lies in the broadest part of the delta, along the brink of a sheet of water—a lake formed by the Avonne; but the upper town, consisting of some five hundred houses and gardens, is built on the higher ground which surrounds the promontory on three sides. This elevation, which was cleared of forest three centuries ago, looks down on the ever-changing picture of the Avonne lake, a sparkling surface covered with rafts built of timber taken from the great piles on the wharves at the water's edge. The streams loaded with floating wood, the picturesque waterfalls on the Avonne, which flows down from a higher level into the river, turning mill-wheels, and furnishing water-power to several factories on its way, all combine to form a busy scene, which is the more unusual on account of its background of green masses of forest; while the distant view up the valley of the Aigues stands out in glorious contrast to the sombre setting of the forest-clad hillsides above the town of Ville-aux-Fayes.

On the side of the valley opposite this vast curtain of trees the king's highway crosses the river by a bridge, and pursues its course till it reaches a row of poplars within a quarter of a league of Ville-aux-Fayes, where a little hamlet lies about a post-station situated there on a large farm. The cross-road from Soulanges likewise curves away round to the bridge, where it joins the king's highway.

Gaubertin had built himself a house in the delta, with a view of making such a place that the lower town should be as handsome as the upper. It was a modern stone house, a single story high, with attics in the slate-covered roof, and

the usual cast-iron balconies, Venetian blinds, much-painted window-sashes, and no ornament save a fretwork under the cornice. There was a spacious courtyard attached to the house, and an "English garden" at the back, on the brink of the Avonne. The sub-prefecture could not be allowed to fall short of such elegance; and at the instance of the deputies, Messieurs Leclercq and Ronquerolles, it was transferred from its wretched temporary quarters to a brand-new mansion built opposite Gaubertin's house. There also the town hall was built, and quite recently a Palais de Justice had been erected for the houseless Court of First Instance; in fact, Ville-aux-Fayes owed a whole series of imposing modern edifices to the spirited example set by its mayor. A police-station completed the outline of the market square.

These changes, of which the inhabitants were not a little proud, were due to Gaubertin's influence. And he, but a few days before, had received the Cross of the Legion of Honor on the occasion of the approaching Birthday. In a mushroom town thus constituted there is no aristocracy and no old *noblesse;* and the citizens, proud of their independence, took up the quarrel of the peasants against a Count of the Empire who had gone over to the Bourbons. To their thinking, the real oppressors were the oppressed. The attitude of the trading town was so well known at the Home Office, that the sub-prefect had been specially chosen; he was a conciliatory spirit, educated by his uncle the famous des Lupeaulx; a man of compromises, familiar with the expedients by which men are governed, the sort of man who is dubbed a time-server by puritanical politicians capable themselves of doing worse.

Gaubertin's house was adorned within with all the tasteless inventions of modern luxury. In the dining-room you beheld expensive paper-hangings with gilt borders, bronze chandeliers, mahogany furniture, chairs covered with crimson leather, astral lamps, round tables with marble tops, a white gilt-edged porcelain dessert service, and colored lith-

ographs; the drawing-room was upholstered in blue cashmere; the whole house looked dreary and commonplace to the last degree; but at Ville-aux-Fayes it was looked upon as the last extreme of the luxury of a Sardanapalus. Mme. Gaubertin played the part of a lady of fashion with great effect; she adopted sundry small affectations, and minced and simpered at forty-five in her quality of mayoress, who has an established position and a little court of her own.

Do not the three houses belonging respectively to Rigou, Soudry, and Gaubertin reflect the country village, the little town, and the sub-prefecture to perfection for those who know France?

Gaubertin was neither a clever man nor a man of talent, but to all appearance he possessed both talent and cleverness. He owed the unfailing justice of his forecasts, like his cunning, to an excessive greed of gain. He coveted fortune, not for his wife's sake, not for his two daughters, nor for his son, nor for himself, nor yet for family considerations and the consequence which money brings; even when the quickening impulse of vengeance was set aside, he loved money-getting; he loved the game for its own sake, like Nucingen the banker, of whom it was said that he was always fingering the gold in both pockets at once.

The round of business was this man's whole life; and now that he was full to repletion, he worked as hard as though he wanted daily bread. All the schemes, and trickery, and crafts of business as a fine art, all the clever strokes to be made, statements of accounts and receipts, all the clash of conflicting interests put Gaubertin in spirits, they set the blood in circulation, and distributed the bile equally over his system. He came and went, rode and drove, and went by boat, and attended sales and auctions in Paris; nothing escaped his attention, and he held countless threads in his hands without confusion.

Gaubertin was quick and decided in his movements and ideas; short, small, and compact, with his sharply cut nose, bright eyes, and erect ears; there was a suggestion of the

hunting-dog about him. The perfectly round and sunburned face, from which the brown ears stood out (for he habitually wore a cap), was in perfect agreement with his character. His nose turned up at the end; the hard lips looked as though they could never unclose to speak a kindly word. A pair of sleek, bushy, black whiskers under the high-colored cheek-bones disappeared in his stock. His frizzled iron-gray hair arranged itself naturally in a succession of rolls like an old-fashioned magistrate's wig; it looked as though it had been crimped by the scorching heat of the fire which burned within that dark head, and flashed in sparks from the little gray eyes. The wrinkles circling their rims were doubtless caused by screwing them up to gaze across country in full sunlight, a characteristic which completed his face. In person he was spare, muscular, and slight; he had the claw-like horny hands covered with hair peculiar to those who take a practical part in their work. His manner usually pleased those who dealt with him, for he could assume a deceptive gayety; he could talk a great deal without saying anything which he did not intend to say; and he wrote but little, so that he might deny anything not in his favor which might escape him at unawares. He had an honest cashier to keep his books; men of Gaubertin's stamp can always unearth an honest subordinate, and in their own interests they make of him their first dupe.

When Rigou's little basket-chaise appeared toward eight o'clock in the poplar avenue by the post-house near the bridge, Gaubertin in cap, jacket, and boots was already returning from his wharves. He quickened his pace at the sight of the chaise, for he rightly guessed that Rigou would only put himself out for "the big business."

"Good day, Daddy Nab; good day, stomach full of gall and wisdom," said he, tapping either visitor on the chest. "We are going to talk business, and we will talk glass in hand, by George, that is the way to do it."

"You ought to grow fat at that trade," said Rigou.

"I am working too hard; I do not keep indoors like the rest of you, who have the bad habit of staying at home like an old pensioner. Oh! you are well off, upon my word, you can do business in an easy-chair, sit at the table with your back to the fire—business comes to find you. Just come in, the house is yours, by George, so long as you stop in it."

A man in a blue livery, faced with red, came to take the horse away to the stables in the yard.

Gaubertin left his guests in the garden for a moment, while he gave orders concerning breakfast. Then he came out to them.

"Well, my little wolves," he said, rubbing his hands, "the gendarmerie of Soulanges were on their way to Conches at daybreak this morning; they are about to arrest the woodstealers, no doubt. They are in a hurry, by George, they are!" (He looked at his watch.) "By this time those fellows ought to be formally and duly arrested."

"Probably they are," said Rigou.

"Well, what do people say in the village, have they made up their minds?"

"What should they make up their minds to do?" demanded Rigou. "This is no concern of ours," he added, giving Soudry a look.

"How is it no concern of yours? If our concerted measures force them to sell the Aigues, who will make five or six hundred thousand francs by it? Shall I, all by myself? I cannot fork out two millions, my purse is not long enough. I have three children to set up in life, and a wife who will not listen to reason on the score of expense. I want, and must have partners. Daddy Nab has the money ready, has he not? He has not a single mortgage which will not have expired; he has bonds for which I am answerable now for his money. I put myself down for eight hundred thousand francs, and my son the judge for two hundred thousand; we are counting on Daddy Nab for another two hundred thousand. How much do you mean to put in, reverend father?"

"The rest," said Rigou coolly.

"The deuce! I should like to have my hand where you have your heart! And what are you going to do?"

"Why, I shall do as you do. Tell us your plan."

"My own plan," said Gaubertin, "is to take double quantity, so as to sell half to those in Conches, Cerneux, and Blangy who want land. Soudry will have customers at Soulanges, and you have yours here. That is not the difficulty. How shall we arrange among ourselves? How shall we divide the big lots?"

"Dear me," said Rigou, "nothing more simple. Each will take what suits him best. I, in the first place, shall give nobody any trouble. I will take the woods with my son-in-law and Soudry. There has been so much damage done in them that they will not tempt you. We will leave you the rest for your share, faith! you will have your money's worth."

"Will you sign an agreement to that effect?" asked Soudry.

"The agreement would be worth nothing," Gaubertin answered. "Besides, you see that I am acting on the square; I am trusting implicitly to Rigou, for the purchase will be made in his name."

"That is good enough for me," said Rigou.

"I make one stipulation; I am to have the hunting-lodge and the outbuildings and fifty acres round about it. I will pay you for the land. I shall make the lodge into a country-house; it will be near my woods. Mme. Gaubertin—Mme. Isaure, as she chooses to be called—will make her 'villa' of it, she says."

"I have no objection," said Rigou.

Gaubertin looked round on all sides; and having made quite certain that by no possibility could any one overhear them, he continued, "Eh! now, between ourselves, do you think they are likely to play us some scurvy trick?"

"For instance?" asked Rigou, who was determined not to understand till Gaubertin should speak out.

"Why, suppose that one of the wildest of the lot, and a handy man with a gun into the bargain, should send a bullet whistling about the Count's ears—just by way of bluster?"

"The Count is the man to run up and collar him."

"Michaud then?—"

"Michaud would keep it quiet; he would bide his time, and play the spy, and find out the man at last and those who had set him on."

"You are right," said Gaubertin. "Thirty of them ought to rise at once. Some of them would be sent to the hulks. . . . After all, they would pick out the scamps, and we would rather be rid of them when they have served our turn. You have two or three good-for-nothings yonder —the Tonsards and Bonnebault, for instance—"

"Tonsard might do some queer stroke of work," said Soudry; "I know him. . . . We will egg him on further through Vaudoyer and Courtecuisse."

"I have Courtecuisse," said Rigou.

"And I have Vaudoyer in the hollow of my hand."

"Let us be cautious!" said Rigou. "Caution, above all things!"

"Come, your reverence, can it be that you imagine that there is any harm in talking about things that are going on about us? Is it we who are taking out warrants, locking people up, stealing wood, and gleaning? If the Count goes the right way to work, if he arranges with some farmer-general to exploit the Aigues, it will be good-by to the baskets, the vintage is over. And you will lose more by it than I. . . . What we say is said between ourselves, and for our own benefit, for I certainly shall not say a word to Vaudoyer which I could not repeat before God and men. . . . But there is no harm in looking forward and profiting by events as they arise. The peasants hereabout are a hotheaded race; the General's regulations and Michaud's severity and persecutions have driven them to the end of their patience. To-day they have made a mess of the busi-

ness, and I will wager that there has been a scuffle with the gendarmerie.—Let us have breakfast."

Mme. Gaubertin came out into the garden to find her guests. She was a somewhat pale-faced woman, with long ringlets drooping on either side of her face. She played the passionate-virtuous rôle, the woman who has never known love. She cultivated Platonic affection with the officials, and had for *cavaliere servente* the public prosecutor, her *patito*, as she called him. Mme. Gaubertin was addicted to caps with top-knots (though preferably she wore nothing to hide her hair), and overdid blue and pale rose-color. She danced. At forty-five she had all the affectations of a young miss, in spite of large feet and alarming hands. She desired to be called Isaure, for amid her many oddities and absurdities she had the good taste to consider that the name of Gaubertin was unpresentable. Her eyes were pale, her hair of some undecided tint resembling dingy nankeen; and, let it be added, a goodly number of young ladies took her for their model, stabbed the sky with their eyes, and posed as angels.

"Well, gentlemen," she said, as she greeted them, "I have strange news for you. The gendarmes have come back—"

"Have they brought any prisoners?"

"None whatever! The General asked for their pardon in advance—and it was granted in honor of the happy anniversary of the accession of our King."

The three associates stared at each other.

"That big Cuirassier is cleverer than I thought him," said Gaubertin. "Let us sit down to table; we need consolation after this. After all, the game is not lost, it is only drawn out. It lies with you now, Rigou."

Soudry and Rigou went home again out of spirits. None of them could think of any expedient for bringing about a catastrophe for their own advantage, so they trusted, as Gaubertin had suggested, that something might turn up.

There were certain Jacobins, in the early days of the

Revolution, who were furious when the clemency of Louis XVI. defeated their purposes, and deliberately provoked the severity of the Court that they might find an excuse for bringing about the anarchy which meant both power and fortune for them. In the same manner, the Comte de Montcornet's formidable enemies put their last hope in the future rigorous methods of Michaud and the keepers. Gaubertin promised his support in general terms; he had no wish that his understanding with Sibilet should be known. Nothing can equal the discretion of a man of Gaubertin's stamp, unless, indeed, it is the discretion of an ex-gendarme or an unfrocked monk. In the hands of three such men, each steeped to the lips in cupidity and hatred, the plot could only end well, or, more properly speaking, ill.

V

HOW A VICTORY WAS WON WITHOUT A BLOW

MME. MICHAUD'S fears had come of the second sight of passionate love. When a soul finds its all-in-all in another soul, it comprehends in the end the whole world in which that other dwells, and sees clearly in that atmosphere. Love brings to a woman the presentiments which, at a later day, become the second-sight of motherhood. While the poor young wife fell into the habit of listening to the confused voices which reach us across the mysterious tracts of space, a scene in which her husband's life was actually threatened took place at the Grand-I-Vert.

Those who had been first astir that morning, before five o'clock, had seen the Soulanges gendarmerie go by on the way to Conches. The news spread quickly; and those interested were astonished to learn from the people who lived on the higher road that a detachment of gendarmerie, under

the Lieutenant of Ville-aux-Fayes, had gone through the Forest of the Aigues. It happened to be a Monday, which in itself was a sufficient reason why the laborers should go to the wineshop, and it was likewise the eve of the anniversary of the return of the Bourbons; not that those who frequented that den of thieves, the Grand-I-Vert, required that "august cause" (as it used to be called) to justify their presence in the tavern, though they would have urged the plea loudly enough if they had seen the shadow of an official of any sort or description.

The Tonsards, with Godain, who was in a manner one of the family, and Vaudoyer, and an old vinedresser named Laroche, were all assembled there. Laroche lived from hand to mouth; he was one of the Blangy delinquents who had been pressed into the service to cure the General of his taste for prosecutions. Blangy had likewise furnished three other men, twelve women, eight girls, and five boys; the women and children had husbands or parents to be responsible for them; but all of them were paupers; in fact, they composed the entire pauper population of Blangy. The vine-growers did well in 1823, and the large quantity of wine in 1826 was sure to mean another good year for them; the General had employed a good deal of labor, and had set money circulating in the neighboring communes, so that it had been no easy task to find a hundred and twenty proletarians in Blangy, Conches, and Cerneux. It had, however, been done. Mothers and grandmothers who had not a sou of their own, like Granny Tonsard, had been put forward. This Laroche, the old laborer, possessed absolutely nothing; he was unlike Tonsard, he had no hot and vicious blood in his veins; it was a dumb, cold hatred that sustained him; he worked in sullen silence, detesting work, and unable to live without it. His features were hard, his expression repellent; his vigor had not failed him, despite his sixty years, but his back was weakened and bowed; he saw no future before him, he would have no bit of field to call his own, and he envied those who had land. So he ravaged the

Forest of the Aigues without mercy, and delighted in doing wanton damage.

"Shall we let them take us away?" asked Laroche. "After Conches, they will come to Blangy; this is my second offence, they will give me three months for it."

"And what can you do against the gendarmerie, you old sot?" retorted Vaudoyer.

"Do? Could not we slash their horses' legs with our scythes? They would soon come down, their guns are not loaded, and when they found themselves outmatched by ten to one, they would soon be obliged to take themselves off. Suppose that the three villages rose, and two or three gendarmes were killed, would they guillotine everybody? They would soon be obliged to give it up, as they did once before on the other side of Burgundy when they called the soldiers out for another affair like this. Bah! the soldiers went, and the peasants kept on cutting wood; they had done it for years and years, just as we have here."

"Life for life," said Vaudoyer; "it would be better to kill just one of them; and to do it without running risks, so as to disgust those *Arminacs* with the place."

"Which of the brigands?" demanded Laroche.

"Michaud," said Courtecuisse. "Vaudoyer is right, right ten times over. You will see that when a keeper has been turned off into the dark it will not be so easy to find others to stay in the sun and keep a lookout. It is not so much that they are there in the daytime, but they are there all night as well.—They are fiends, that they are!"

"Wherever you go," said Granny Tonsard (and the old woman of seventy showed her parchment face, pitted with countless holes, pierced with two green slits of eyes, and garnished with locks of dingy white hair, which straggled out from beneath a red handkerchief), "wherever you go, you come upon them, and they stop you. They look into your fagot, and if there is a single green branch in it, if there is so much as a miserable hazel switch, they will take away the fagot and take out a summons; they are as good

as their word. Ah! the blackguards! there is no way of getting at them; and if they suspect you, they will soon make you undo your fagot. They are three curs yonder that are not worth two farthings; if they were put out of the way, it would not ruin France, at any rate."

"Little Vatel has not so much harm in him," said her daughter-in-law.

"*Him!*" said Laroche; "he does his work like the rest of them. He will joke right enough and laugh with you; but you stand none the better with him for that. He is the worst of the three; like M. Michaud, he has no heart for the poor people—"

"M. Michaud has a pretty wife, all the same," said Nicolas Tonsard.

"She is with young," said the old grandmother; "but if things go on like this, there will be a queer christening when she calves."

"Oh!" cried Marie Tonsard, "it is impossible to joke with any of those *Arminacs* of Parisians. They would take out a summons against you if it came to it, and no more care about you than if they had never joked—"

"So you have tried to come round them, have you?" said Courtecuisse.

"Lord love you!"

"Well," said Tonsard, looking like a man who has made up his mind, "they are men like others, we may get round them."

"My word, no," Marie went on, following out her thought, "they do not laugh at all. What they give them, I do not know; for, after all, if that swaggerer at the hunting lodge is married, Steingel, and Vatel, and Gaillard are not; and there is nobody else—there is not a woman in the country who would have anything to say to them."

"We shall see directly how things go at harvest and the vintage," said Tonsard.

"They will not stop the gleaning," said the grandmother.

"But I am not so sure of that," replied her daughter-in-

law. "That Groison of theirs said plainly that M. le Maire was about to give notice that no one should glean without a pauper's certificate, and who will give them but he himself, and you may be sure that he will not give many. He is going to forbid us to go into the fields until the last sheaf is carted—"

"Why, he has you every way, that Cuirassier," shouted Tonsard, transported with rage.

"I only heard this yesterday," said his wife; "I offered Groison a nip of brandy to get news out of him."

"There is one that is well off!" cried Vaudoyer. "They have built him a house, and found him a good wife, he has money coming in, he is dressed like a king. I myself was a rural policeman for twenty years, and I got nothing by it but colds."

"Yes, he is well off," said Godain; "he has property—"

"And we stop here like the idiots we are!" cried Vaudoyer; "let us go to Conches, at any rate, and see what is going on there; they have no more patience than the rest of us—"

"Let us go," said Laroche, who was none too steady on his feet. "If I do not put an end to one or two of them, I wish I may lose my name."

"*You!*" said Tonsard, "you would let them carry off the whole commune; but, for my own part, if any one were to lay a finger on the old woman, there is my gun, and it would not miss."

"Well," said Laroche, turning to Vaudoyer, "if they take a single one from Conches, there will be a gendarme stretched out."

"Daddy Laroche has said it!" cried Courtecuisse.

"He has said it," said Vaudoyer, "but he has not done it, and he will not do it. What good would you get by it unless you happen to want a drubbing? Life for life—it would be better to kill Michaud."

While this scene took place, Catherine Tonsard had been standing sentinel at the tavern door, to warn the drinkers to

be quiet if any one went by. In spite of their vinous gait, they dashed rather than went out of the door, and in their bellicose ardor took the road which lies for three-quarters of a mile under the park walls of the Aigues.

Conches was a thoroughly Burgundian hamlet, a collection of squalid-looking cottages, built some of brick and some of clay, along the highroad which formed its single street. The hamlet looked fairly presentable when approached from the opposite side by the cross road from Ville-aux-Fayes, for a little river flowed between the highroad and the Ronquerolles woods, which succeeded to those of the Aigues along the heights, and the view was enlivened by two or three houses rather picturesquely grouped. The church and parsonage house stood apart, a principal feature in the view from the adjacent Conches gate of the park.

The conspirators from the Grand-I-Vert caught sight of the gendarmerie through the trees in the square in front of the church, and sped along with redoubled haste. Even as they came up, three horsemen issued from the Conches gate of the park, and the peasants recognized the General, his servant, and Michaud, the head-forester, who galloped off toward the square. Tonsard and his party reached the spot a few minutes later.

The delinquents, male and female, had made no sort of resistance; there they stood, encircled by five gendarmes from Soulanges and fifteen from Ville-aux-Fayes. The whole village had turned out. The prisoners' children or mothers and fathers came and went, bringing them such things as they should need while they were in prison. The scene was curious enough; the population were evidently indignant, but they scarcely said a word, like people who had made up their minds that the thing must be. The women, old and young, were the only speakers. The children and the little girls were perched on piles of logs the better to see.

"Those hussars of the guillotine have chosen their time well! They have come on a holiday," the women were saying.

"So you let them take away your husband like that, do you? What will become of you during the next three months, the three best in the whole year, when wages are high?"

"*They* are the real thieves!" retorted the woman, with a menacing glance at the gendarmes.

"What makes you squint at us in that way?" asked the quartermaster. "You may be sure of this, that if you indulge yourself in insults, it will not take long to settle your business."

"I didn't say anything," the woman hastily remarked, with a meek and piteous countenance.

"I might make you repent of some words that I overheard just now."

"Come, children, be quiet," said the mayor of Conches, the postmaster. "The devil! the men must do as they are told!"

"That is true, it is all the doing of the master at the Aigues. But, patience!"

At that moment the General came out into the square; his arrival produced some murmurs, but he troubled himself very little about them. He went straight to the lieutenant of gendarmerie from Ville-aux-Fayes; a few words were spoken, and a paper handed over, then the officer turned to his men—

"Release your prisoners, the General has obtained their pardon from the King."

While he spoke, General de Montcornet talked with the mayor of Conches in low tones, and after a moment the latter raised his voice and addressed the delinquents, who had looked to sleep that night in prison, and were all bewildered at finding themselves at liberty.

"You must thank M. le Comte, my friends," he said; "you owe the remission of the penalties to him; he went to Paris to ask pardon for you, and obtained it in honor of the anniversary of the King's return to France. . . . I hope that you will behave better in future toward the General,

who has behaved so kindly toward you, and that you will respect his property henceforth. . . . Long live the King."

And the peasants shouted, "Long live the King," with enthusiasm, to avoid shouting, "Long live the Count."

This scene had been planned by the General in concert with the prefect and attorney-general with a deliberate purpose. While showing firmness to stimulate the local authorities and impress the minds of the country people, the peasants were to be treated gently; so delicate did these crises appear to be. And, indeed, if any resistance had been offered, the Government would have been placed in a very awkward position. As Laroche had said, it was impossible to send a whole commune to the guillotine.

The General had asked the mayor of Conches, the lieutenant, and the quartermaster to breakfast with him. The conspirators of Blangy stayed in the tavern at Conches. The released offenders were spending the money which would otherwise have supported them in prison on drink, and naturally the Blangy folk were asked to the "wedding." Country people call every rejoicing a "wedding," and they eat and drink and quarrel and fight and go home again drunk and disabled, and this is called a "wedding."

The General took his guests, not by the Conches gate, whence he had issued, but by the forest, in order to show them the damage that had been done, so that they might judge of the importance of the question.

At noon, when Rigou was returning home to Blangy, the Count and Countess and their guests were finishing breakfast in the splendid room described in Blondet's letter to Nathan, the room on which Bouret's luxurious tastes had left its impress.

"It would be a great pity to give up such a place," said the lieutenant. He had been over the Aigues, and had seen it all for the first time; and now, looking about him over the rim of a glass of champagne, he observed the admirable series of unclad nymphs who supported the ceiling.

"Wherefore we shall defend ourselves to the death," said Blondet.

The lieutenant gave his quartermaster a glance which seemed to recommend silence to that officer. "Suppose that I say that the General's enemies are not all among the fields," he began.

The gallant lieutenant was softened by the splendid breakfast, the magnificent plate, the imperial luxury which had replaced the luxury of the opera girl; and Blondet's wit had been as stimulating as the soldierly bumpers which they had drained.

"How is it that I have enemies?" asked the astonished General.

"So kind as he is," added the Countess.

"He and our mayor, M. Gaubertin, parted in anger, and, for the sake of a quiet life, he should be reconciled with him."

"With *him!*" cried the Count; "then you do not know that he was my steward, and a dishonest scamp?"

"He is not a scamp now," said the lieutenant; "he is the mayor of Ville-aux-Fayes."

"Our lieutenant is a clever man," said Blondet; "it is plain that a mayor is by nature honest."

The lieutenant, seeing from the Count's remark that it was impossible to open his eyes, said no more on that subject.

VI

THE FOREST AND THE HARVEST

THE SCENE at Conches had a good effect; the Count's faithful keepers saw that no green wood was taken out of the forest of the Aigues; but the forest had been so thoroughly exploited by the peasants for twenty years that there was nothing but young growth left, and, dead wood being scarce, they were busy killing the trees against the coming winter. The means used were extremely simple, and could only be discovered some time afterward.

Tonsard sent his mother into the forest, the keeper used to see her come in, and knowing the way by which she would go out, would lie in wait to inspect her fagot. As a matter of fact, he always found nothing in it but sear brushwood, fallen branches, and withered and broken boughs, and Granny Tonsard used to groan and pity herself because at her age she had to go so far to pick up such a miserable bundle of sticks. But she did not say that she had been in the dense thickets, where the saplings grew, grubbing at the base of the young trees, and stripping off a ring of bark close to the ground, covering up her work with moss and leaves, and leaving all apparently as it was before. It was impossible to detect this ring-shaped incision, made not with a bill-hook, but by tearing away the bark in such a manner that the damage seemed to be the work of the cockchafer grub, a wood-gnawing insect pest known by the various names of "the Turk," the wood-worm, and wood-maggot in different parts of the country. This grub lives upon bark, lodging itself between the bark and the wood to gnaw its way underneath. If the tree is large enough, and the grub fails to

make the circuit before its transformation into the chrysalis stage, it is safe, for so long as the bark is not ringed round, the tree can grow. To show the intimate connection between entomology, agriculture, horticulture, and vegetable production generally, it is sufficient to point out that Latreille, the Comte Dejean, and Klug of Berlin, Géné of Turin, and other great naturalists have discovered that nearly all insects feed on vegetable growths. There are twenty-seven thousand species of plant-eating coleoptera in M. Dejean's published catalogue; and in spite of the eager research of entomologists of all countries, there are still an enormous number of species unidentified in their triple transformations. Not only has every wild plant its particular insect pest, but every vegetable product, however modified by human industry, has its special insect. The hemp and flax which clothes human creatures and goes to the making of ropes to hang them, after covering the backs of an army, is transformed into writing-paper, and those who read or write much are familiar with the habits of the "silver fish," an insect marvellous in its appearance and genesis, which passes through its mysterious transformations in a ream of carefully kept white paper. You behold the creature skip nimbly in his splendid raiment, glittering like talc or spar; it is a flying "silver fish."

The wood-maggot is the despair of the cultivator. In its earlier stages it hides below ground, safe out of reach of administrative circulars; so that the authorities can only order a series of Sicilian vespers when it emerges as a full-grown cockchafer. If people knew the whole extent of the damage done by cockchafers and caterpillars, they would pay more attention to the prefect's injunctions. Holland all but perished because the teredo burrowed in her dikes, and science has not yet discovered the final transformation of the teredo, nor the earlier metamorphoses of the cochineal insect. In all probability the ergot of rye is a seething insect population, though scientific genius can only discern slight movement in its particles.

So as the peasants waited for harvest and vintage some fifty old women imitated the work of the cockchafer grub at the foot of five or six hundred trees which should never bear leaves again and stand up, dead and stark, in the spring. All the trees were purposely chosen in out-of-the-way spots, so that the peasants might the better secure the spoil of dead branches. Who told them the secret? No one in so many words; but Courtecuisse had complained one day at the tavern that an elm-tree in his garden was dying at the top; there was something the matter with the tree; and he, Courtecuisse, suspected that it was a wood-maggot, he knew well what a wood-maggot was, and he knew that when a tree had a wood-maggot in it that tree was as good as dead. Then he showed his audience in the tavern how the maggot went round the tree.

The old women did their work of destruction as mysteriously and as deftly as pixies, urged on by the exasperating measures taken by the mayor of Blangy. Other mayors had received instructions to follow the example set them. The rural police made public proclamation that no one would be allowed to glean in cornfields or vineyards without a certificate from the mayor of each commune; the prefect sent down an example of the certificate required to the sub-prefecture, and the sub-prefect supplied the mayors with a pattern copy apiece. The great landowners of the district admired Montcornet's behavior, and the prefect said that if other great personages would do likewise, and live on their estates, the results would be of the happiest; for such measures as these, added the prefect, ought to be taken all over the country; they should be uniformly adopted and modified by benevolence and such enlightened philanthropy as that of General de Montcornet.

And the General and the Countess, with the help of the Abbe Brossette, were, in fact, endeavoring to help the people. They had thought out their plans carefully; they desired to show in a practical and unmistakable fashion that those who were plundering them would do better for them-

selves by earning an honest livelihood. They gave out hemp to be spun, and paid for the work, and the Countess had the thread woven into hessian for kitchen cloths, dusters, and aprons, and shirts for the very poor. The Count undertook improvements, drawing all his laborers from the neighboring communes. The details were left to Sibilet, and the Abbé Brossette informed the Countess of cases of poverty, and brought them under her notice. Mme. de Montcornet held her Assizes of Mercy in the great hall above the steps. It was a beautiful vestibule, paved with marble red and white; an ornamental majolica stove stood in it, and the long benches were covered with red velvet.

Thither one morning before the harvest came old Granny Tonsard with her granddaughter Catherine; she had a terrible confession to make touching the honor of a poor but honest family. While she spoke, Catherine stood like a guilty thing, and then in her turn she told of her "strait." Nobody knew of it but her grandmother, she said; her mother would drive her out of the house; her father, a man of honor, would kill her. If she had but a thousand francs, there was a poor laborer named Godain who was willing to marry her; he knew all, and he loved her like a brother. He would buy a bit of waste land and build a cottage upon it. It was touching. The Countess promised to set aside a sum of money, the price of a sacrificed whim, for a marriage portion. The two happy marriages of Michaud and Groison had encouraged her in match-making; and besides, this wedding was to set a good example to the peasants, and a higher standard of conduct. So a marriage was arranged between Godain and Catherine by means of Mme. de Montcornet's money.

Another time it was Granny Bonnébault, a horrible old woman, who lived in a cabin between the Conches gate and the village, who came with a load of hanks of spun hemp.

"The Countess has worked miracles," said the Abbé, full of hope for the moral improvement of these savages. "That woman used to do a great deal of damage in your woods;

but now, why should she go? She spins from morning to night; she is busy, and earning money."

The country was quiet. Groison brought in satisfactory reports, the wood-stealing seemed to be almost at an end; perhaps, indeed, a real transformation might have been wrought, but for Gaubertin's rancorous greed, but for the petty cabals of the "best society" of Soulanges, but for Rigou's intrigues, which fanned the flames of hate and crime smouldering in the minds of the peasants of the valley.

The foresters, however, complained that they found many branches gashed with the billhook in the forest; evidently somebody intended to find dead wood for winter fuel. But their efforts to discover those persons were fruitless. The Count with Groison's assistance had given paupers' certificates to the thirty or forty who really needed them; but other communes had been less particular. The Count was determined that after his late clemency in the matter of the arrests at Conches the regulations as to the harvest must be strictly enforced, for gleaning had degenerated into robbery. With the three farms which he had let on lease he did not concern himself; but he had half a dozen smaller farms which paid rent in kind on the system of division of produce between landlord and tenant, and on these he meant to take his stand. He had given notice that any one who should enter a field before the last sheaf had been carted away should be prosecuted; an order which interested no other farmer in the commune; for Rigou, who knew the country well, used to let his arable land in little plots and on short leases to men who reaped their own crops themselves; he stipulated that his rents should be paid in grain, the abuse of gleaning did not affect him. Nor did it affect the remaining farmers, for peasant proprietors let each other alone.

The Count had instructed Sibilet to see that his tenants cut their corn in succession, and to put all the harvesters to work at once on the same farm, so that it might be easier to keep a watch upon them. This plan had been suggested

by Groison, who was to superintend the influx of gleaners into every field. The Count went in person with Michaud to see it in operation.

Town-dwellers would never imagine what the gleaning means to country people; indeed, the French peasant's passion for gleaning is quite inexplicable, for women will leave well-paid work to pick up stray ears in the fields. The corn gleaned in this way appears to have peculiar virtue in it, and the provision thus made for the more substantial part of their daily food has an immense attraction for them. Mothers bring toddling children with their older girls and boys; the most decrepit old people drag themselves to the fields; and, as might be expected, those who are not really poor will feign poverty and go a-gleaning in rags.

The Count and Michaud had ridden out to watch the onslaught of the tattered crowd upon the first field of the first farm.

It was ten o'clock on a hot August morning, the cloudless sky above was blue as periwinkle blossoms, the earth was burning, the wheat fields blazed like flame, the sun beat down on the hard soil which reflected the heat up in waves to scorch the faces of the reapers who, with shirts wet with perspiration, toiled in silence, only stopping now and again to drink from their round, loaf-shaped stone water-bottles, cruses with two ears, and a rough spout stoppered by a peg of willow.

At the edge of the stubble-field, where the last sheaves were being piled on the wagons, stood a hundred human beings, who, in their wretchedness, surely left the most hideous conceptions of a Murillo or a Teniers far behind. Here were the most daring pictures of beggary, and faces such as a Callot, the poet of misery in its most fantastic phases, has drawn to the life. Here were the limbs of bronze, the bald heads, the strangely degraded tints, the tattered greasy rags—darned, patched, stained, discolored, worn down to the bare threads. Here, in short, the painter's ideal of the trappings of misery was overtopped,

even as those faces, in their anxiety, greed, imbecility, idiocy, and savagery surpassed the immortal creations of the princes of color, in that they possessed the immortal advantage of Nature over Art. There stood old crones, with red lashless eyelids, stretching out their turkey's throats like pointers putting up a partridge; there stood children mute as sentinels on guard, and little girls stamping with impatience like animals waiting to be let out to pasture; every characteristic of infancy and age was obliterated by a common frenzy of greed in all faces; all coveted their neighbor's goods, which long abuse had made their own. Their eyes glared, they made threatening gestures, but none of them spoke in the presence of the Count, the policeman, and the head-forester. The landowner, the farmer, the worker, and the pauper were all represented there, and the social problem behind the scene was outlined very clearly, for hunger had summoned those threatening figures. Every hard feature, every hollow in their faces, was brought into relief by the sunlight which scorched their bare dusty feet; some of the children had no clothing but a ragged blouse, and their flaxen curls were full of bits of wood, straw, and hay, and here and there a woman held by the hand a mere baby which could scarcely toddle, to be put down presently to crawl along the furrows.

This dreadful picture was intolerable to an old soldier with a kind heart. The General spoke to Michaud.

"It hurts me to see them. If we did not know all that was involved in these measures, it would be impossible to persist."

"If every landowner were to follow your example, General, and live on his estate, and do good as you are doing, I do not say that there would be no poor, for we have the poor always with us, but there would be no one who could not make an honest living."

"The mayors of Conches, Cerneux, and Soulanges have sent us their paupers," said Groison, who had been verifying the certificates; "they ought not to do that."

"No," said the Count, "but our paupers will go to glean in their communes; it is enough for the present if they do not help themselves from the sheaves. We must take one step at a time," and he went away.

"Did you hear that?" asked Granny Tonsard, turning to Bonnébault's mother. The Count happening to raise his voice a little over the last words, they reached the ears of one of the two old crones who were posted on the road by the edge of the field.

"Yes, that is not all; a tooth to-day, an ear to-morrow; if they could invent a sauce for it, they would eat us up; a calf's liver or a Christian's would be all the same to them," said Granny Bonnébault.

She lifted up her malignant features as the General passed; but in the twinkling of an eye a hypocritical expression of honeyed amiability overspread her face, and with an ingratiating grin she hastily made a deep courtesy.

"What! are you gleaning, too, when my wife has put you in the way of earning plenty of money?"

"Eh! God keep you in health, my dear gentleman! But, you see, that lad of mine eats everything up, and I be forced to hide away this little mite of corn to have bread to eat in the winter. So I be gleaning again for a bit—it all helps!"

The gleaners made little that year. When the farmers and crofters knew that they would be supported, they cut their corn carefully and looked after the sheaves, and saw that the fields were clear, in such a sort that there was, at any rate, less of the open robbery of previous harvests.

This year, too, the gleaners looked in vain for the wheat which always made a certain proportion of their bundles; and impostors and paupers, who had forgotten their pardon at Conches, cherished in consequence a smothered feeling of discontent, imbittered in tavern talk by the Tonsards, by Courtecuisse, Bonnébault, Laroche, Vaudoyer, Godain, and their following. Matters grew worse after the vintage, for no one was allowed to go into the vineyards until the

grapes were all cut, and the vines had been very closely picked over; Sibilet had seen to that. This exasperated the peasants to the last degree; but when there is so great a gulf set between the class which rises in menace and the class which is threatened, words are not carried across it; deeds are the only sign of the matters which are brewing, and the malcontents betake themselves to work underground like moles.

The fair at Soulanges went off quietly enough save for some amenities that passed between the best society and the second-rate, thanks to the queen's uneasy despotism. It was intolerable to her that the fair Euphémie Plissoud should reign over the brilliant Lupin's heart, when his fickle affections should have been centred upon herself.

The Count and Countess had appeared neither at the fair, nor at the Tivoli, and this was counted as a crime by the Soudrys and Gaubertins and their adherents. It was all pride and superciliousness, so they said in Mme. Soudry's drawing-room.

Meanwhile the Countess was filling up the blank left by Émile's absence by the great interest which noble natures take in the good which they try to do; and the Count threw no less zeal into the improvements on his estate, which he intended to effect a corresponding improvement both material and moral in the people of the district. Little by little, with the help of the Abbé Brossette, Mme. de Montcornet came to have an accurate knowledge of the circumstances of the poor families, of their requirements and their means of subsistence, and learned how much thoughtful care was needed to give them assistance by helping them to work, lest they should be encouraged in lazy or idle habits.

The Countess had placed Geneviève Niseron in a convent, under the pretext of having her taught to do needlework sufficiently well to be employed in her household; but in reality Geneviève was sent out of reach of Nicolas Tonsard, whom Rigou had managed to exempt from military service. The Countess thought, moreover, that a devout education,

and the guarded seclusion of the convent, would sooner or later quell the ardent passions of a precocious child whose fiery Montenegrin blood seemed to her at times to threaten to break into a flame which might consume her faithful Olympe Michaud's happiness.

So there was tranquillity at the Aigues. The Count, reassured by Michaud, and lulled into security by Sibilet, congratulated himself upon his firmness, and thanked his wife for contributing by her beneficence to the great result of their tranquillity. As for the sale of the timber, the General held the question over till he could return to Paris and arrange in person with wood merchants. He had not the slightest idea of the way in which the business was carried on, and was far from suspecting the extent of Gaubertin's influence along the Yonne, or that the mayor of Ville-aux-Fayes supplied the larger part of Paris with fuel.

VII

THE GREYHOUND

ABOUT THE MIDDLE of September, Émile came back to the Aigues. He had gone to Paris to arrange for the publication of a book, and now he meant to rest and to think over the work which he was planning for the winter. At the Aigues the wearied journalist disappeared, and Émile Blondet became once more frank, fresh-hearted, as in the days of his early manhood.

"What a beautiful nature!" said the Count and Countess when they spoke of him.

Men accustomed to knock about in the world, to see the seamy side of life, and to gather in experience of all kinds without restraint, make an oasis in their hearts, and leave their own evil tendencies and those of others outside it. Within a narrow charmed circle they become saints in min-

iature; they have a woman's sensitiveness, with their whole souls they strive for a momentary realization of their ideal, and for the one soul in the world who worships them they raise themselves to angelic heights. Nor are they playing a comedy. They turn the inner self out to grass, as it were; they crave to have the stains of mud brushed off, their bruises healed, and their wounds bound. When Émile Blondet came to the Aigues he left malice behind, and with it most of his wit, not an epigram did he utter, he was as mild as a lamb and suavely Platonic.

"He is such a good young fellow that I miss him when he is not here," the General used to say. "I should dearly like him to make his fortune and give up that Paris life."

Never had the glorious landscape and the park at the Aigues been more luxuriantly beautiful than in those September days. In the earliest autumn weather, when earth is weary of bringing forth her fruits, and fills the air in the empty fields and orchards with the delicious scent of leaves, the forests are the most wonderful sight of all, for then they begin to take bronze-green hues and warm ochre tints, to blend in the fair tapestry beneath which they hide, as if to defy the coming cold of winter.

Earth in the spring looked gay and joyous, a dark-haired maid who hopes and looks forward; Earth in the autumn, grown melancholy and mild, is a fair-haired woman who remembers. The grass grows golden, the heads of the autumn flowers are crowned with pale petals, the white daisies look up seldom now from the lawn, and you see the purplish-green calyces instead. There is yellow color everywhere. The trees cast thinner and darker shadows; the sun, slanting lower already, steals under them to leave faint gleams of orange color, and long luminous shafts, which vanish swiftly over the ground like the trailing robes of women departing.

On the morning of the second day after his arrival, Émile stood at the window of his room, which gave upon one of the terraces, from which there was a beautiful view. The

Countess's apartments were likewise upon the terrace, and faced the view toward Blangy and the forests. The pond (which nearer Paris would have been styled a lake) and its long channel were almost out of sight, but the silver spring which rose in the wood near the hunting lodge crossed the lawn like a silken ribbon covered with bright spangles of sand.

Beyond the park palings lay fields where cattle were grazing, and little properties, full of walnut and apple trees, inclosed by hedges, stood out against the hillside, covered with the walls and houses and cultivated land of Blangy, and higher yet, ridges covered with tall forest trees rose up stepwise to the heights which framed the whole picture.

The Countess had come out upon the terrace to see her flowers, which filled the air with their morning fragrance. She wore a loose cambric wrapper, through which her pretty shoulders sent a faint rose flush; a dainty cap sat piquantly on her hair, which strayed rebelliously from beneath it; her little foot shone through the transparent stocking; and whenever the wind stirred, it fluttered her thin dressing-gown, giving glimpses of an embroidered cambric petticoat carelessly fastened over her corset.

"Oh, are you there?" asked she.

"Yes—"

"What are you looking at?"

"What a question to ask! You have snatched me from the contemplation of nature.—Tell me, Countess, will you take a walk in the woods this morning before breakfast?"

"What an idea! You know that I hold walks in abhorrence."

"We will only walk a very short way. I will drive you in the tilbury, and Joseph can come with us to look after it. You never set foot in your forest, and I notice something odd in it: little groups of trees here and there have turned the color of Florentine bronze; the leaves are withering—"

"Very well, I will dress at once."

"We should not start for two hours! No. Take a shawl and a hat—and thick shoes, that is all that is necessary."

"You must always have your way— I will come back in one moment."

"General, we are going out, will you come with us?" called Blondet, going away to waken the Count, who replied by the grunt of a man still locked in morning slumber.

Fifteen minutes later the tilbury was moving slowly along one of the broad avenues through the park, followed at a distance by a stalwart servant on horseback.

It was a true September morning. Spaces of dark blue sky shone in a cloud-dappled heaven, as if they, and not the clouds, were flitting over the ether of space. Long streaks of ultramarine blue, alternating with folds of cloud, lay like ribs of sand low down on the horizon, and higher up, above the forest, a greenish tint overspread the sky. Earth lay warm under the cloudy covering, like a woman just awakened. The forest scents were mingled with the scent of the plowed land, a wild savor in the steaming fragrance of the soil. The bell was ringing for the Angelus at Blangy; the notes, blended with the mysterious sound of the wind in the woods, made harmony with the silence. Here and there thin white mists were rising.

Olympe Michaud, seeing these fair preparations for the day, took it into her head to go out with her husband, who was obliged to give an order to one of the keepers who lived a short distance away. The Soulanges doctor had recommended her to take walks without overtiring herself, but she was afraid of the heat at noon, and did not care to venture out in the evening. Michaud went with her, and took his favorite dog, a mouse-colored greyhound spotted with white; greedy, like all greyhounds, and full of faults, like all animals who know they are loved and have the gift of pleasing.

So it happened that when the tilbury reached the hunting-lodge and the Countess inquired after Mme. Michaud's

health, she was told that Olympe had gone into the forest with her husband.

"This weather inspires the same thought in every one," said Blondet, turning the horse into one of the six roads at random. "By the by, Joseph, do you know the forest?"

"Yes, sir."

And away they went. The avenue which they had chosen was one of the loveliest in the forest; after a little while it swerved round, and became a narrow winding track. The sun shone down into it through the chinks in the leafy roof which closed it in like a green bower; the breeze brought the scent of thyme and lavender and wild peppermint, and sounds of dead branches and leaves falling to earth with a rustling sigh; the drops of dew scattered over the leaves and grass were shaken and fell as the light carriage went past. The further the two travellers went, the deeper they penetrated into the mysterious fantasies of the forest; into cool depths where the leaves grow in the damp and darkness, and the light that enters turns to velvet as it dies away; through clearer spaces of graceful birch-trees gathered about their over-lord, the Hercules of the forest, a hundred-year-old beech; through assemblies of grand tree trunks, knotted, mossy, pale-colored, riven with deep furrows, tracing gigantic blurred shadows over the ground. Along the side of the way they took grew a border of thin grass and delicate flowers. The streams had singing voices. Surely it is an unspeakable delight to drive along forest tracks, slippery with moss, when the woman by your side clings to you in real or simulated terror at every up and down of the road. You feel the fresh warmth, the involuntary or deliberate pressure, of her arm, the weight of a soft white shoulder, she begins to smile if you tell her that she is bringing you to a standstill, and the horse seems to understand these interruptions, and looks to right and left.

The Countess grew dreamy. The sight of this forest world, so vigorous in its effects, so unfamiliar and so grand, was new to her. She leaned back in the tilbury and gave herself up

to the pleasure of being beside Émile. His eyes were occupied, his heart spoke to hers, and a voice within her gave response. Émile stole a glance at her, and enjoyed her mood of meditative dreaming. The ribbon-strings of her hood had come unfastened, and given to the morning wind the silken curls of her fair hair in luxuriant abandonment. They drove on as chance directed, and in consequence were confronted by a closed gate across the road. They had not the key; and Joseph, when summoned, proved to be likewise unprovided.

"Very well, let us walk. Joseph shall stay here with the tilbury; we shall easily find our way back."

Émile and the Countess plunged into the forest, and reached a spot whence they saw a little landscape set in the woods, such a scene as you often see in a great forest. Twenty years ago the charcoal-burners had cleared the space for their charcoal kiln, burning everything for a considerable area round about, and the trees had not grown again. But in twenty years Nature had had time to make a flower garden there; and even as a painter will paint some one picture for himself, she had made a garden of her own. Tall trees grew round about that delicious pleasance, their crests drooped over it in a deep fringe, like a great canopy above the couch where the goddess reposes.

The charcoal-burners had beaten a path to the edge of a pool of water, always clear and full to the brim. The path still existed, tempting you to follow it by a coquettish bend, till suddenly it was rent across, displaying a sheer surface of earth, where myriads of tree roots, exposed to the air, grew interwoven like canvas for tapestry work. Short green turf surrounded the lonely pool, a few willows and an aspen here and there spread a light veil of shadow over a bank of soft grass, laid down by some meditative or ease-loving charcoal-burner. Frogs leap and tadpoles swim undisturbed, moor-hens and water-fowl come and go, a hare flies from your presence, the delightful bathing-place, decked with the tallest of green rushes, is at your disposal. The trees above

your head take many shapes; here a trunk raises its head like a boa-constrictor, there the beeches shoot up straight and tall as Grecian columns, to their green crests. Slugs and snails promenade in peace, a tench shows its nose above the surface of the pool, a squirrel eyes you curiously.

When Émile and the Countess sat down to rest at last, some bird broke the silence with an autumn song—a song of farewell to which all the other birds listened, one of those songs which awaken passionate response in the listener, and appeal to all the senses.

"How silent it is!" said the Countess; she felt moved, and lowered her voice as if she feared to trouble that peace. They gazed at the green patches on the water, little worlds of growing and living organisms, and bade each other see the lizard basking in the sun; at their approach it fled, justifying its nickname—the "friend of man." "Which proves how well he knows man!" commented Émile. They watched the bolder frogs return to the bed of cresses by the water's edge, and show their eyes sparkling like carbuncles. The sense of the simple and tender mystery of nature passed little by little into these two souls, on whom the artificialities of the world had palled, and steeped them in a mood of contemplative emotion—when, suddenly, Blondet shuddered and leaned toward the Countess to whisper:

"Do you hear that?"

"What?"

"A strange sound."

"Just like these literary people, who stay in their studies and know nothing of the country. That is a woodpecker making a hole in a tree. I will wager that you do not even know the most curious thing about the woodpecker. Every time that he gives a tap (and he gives hundreds of taps to hollow out an oak twice as thick as your body), he goes round to the back of it to see if he has pierced a hole through."

"That noise, dear lecturer on natural history, was not made by a bird; there was that indescribable something in it which reveals a human intelligence at work."

The Countess was seized with a panic of fear. She fled across the little wild garden, reached the path again, and seemed bent on flight from the forest.

"What is the matter?" cried Blondet, hurrying after her anxiously.

"I thought that I saw eyes," she said, when they had gained one of the paths by which they had come to the clearing made by the charcoal-burners.

Even as she spoke, they both heard another sound—the dying moan of some creature, a stifled sound, as if its throat had been suddenly cut. The Countess's fears were redoubled; she fled so swiftly that Blondet could scarcely keep pace with her. On and on she fled, like a will-o'-the-wisp; she did not hear Émile's cry—"It is a mistake!" Still she ran, and Blondet, instead of overtaking her, fell more and more behind.

At length they came upon Michaud walking with his wife on his arm. Émile was panting, and the Countess so much out of breath that it was some time before they could speak and explain what had happened. Michaud, like Blondet, scoffed at the lady's fears, and put the straying pair in the way to find the tilbury. When they reached the bar across the road, Olympe Michaud called to the dog.

"Prince! Prince!" shouted the forester. He whistled and whistled again, but no dog appeared. Then Émile mentioned the mysterious sounds with which the adventure began.

"My wife heard the sound," said Michaud, "and I laughed at her."

"Some one has killed Prince!" cried the Countess. "I am sure of it now; they must have cut his throat at a stroke, for the sound which I heard was the dying groan of some animal."

"The devil!" said Michaud; "this is worth looking into."

Émile and the forester left the two women with Joseph and the horses, and turned back into the cleared space. They went down to the pond, searched among the knolls, and found

not a sign nor a trace of the dog. Blondet was the first to climb the bank again; and noticing a tree with withered leaves, he called Michaud's attention to it, and determined to examine it for himself. The two men struck out a straight line through the forest, avoiding the fallen trunks, dense holly thickets, and brambles in their way, and reached the tree in question.

"It is a fine elm," said Michaud, "but there is a wood-worm at the root of it—a worm has ringed the bark at the foot." He stooped down and lifted up the bark: "There, only see what work!"

"There are a good many wood-worms in this forest of yours," said Blondet.

As he spoke, Michaud saw a red drop a few paces away, and further yet, his greyhound's head. He heaved a sigh. "The rascals!—my lady was right."

Blondet and Michaud went up to the body. The Countess was right. The dog's throat had been cut. Prince had been coaxed by a bit of pickled pork to prevent him from barking, for the morsel lay half swallowed between the tongue and the palate.

"Poor brute, his weakness caused his death."

"Exactly the way with princes," said Blondet.

"Some one was here who did not want to be found here, and made off," said Michaud, "so there is something seriously wrong. And yet I see no branches broken nor trees cut down."

Blondet and the forester began a careful investigation, looking over every inch of ground before setting down their feet. At last Émile found that some one had been kneeling under a tree a few paces away, the grass was trodden down and bent, and there were two hollow dints in the moss.

"Some one has been kneeling here," he said, "and it was a woman, for a man's legs would not have crushed so much grass below the knees; look at the outline of the petticoat."

The forester scanned the foot of the tree, and saw that a wood-maggot had begun its work; but there was no trace of

the grub itself, with the tough glistening skin, the brown-tipped scales, the tail already something like that of the cockchafer, and the head provided with antennæ and two strong jaws with which the insect cuts the roots of plants.

"Now, my dear fellow, I can understand why there are such a quantity of dead trees in the forest. I noticed them this morning from the terrace at the chateau, and came here on purpose to discover the cause of that phenomenon. The worms are stirring, but it is your peasants who creep out of the woods."

The head-forester let fly an oath. Then, followed by Blondet, he hurried to find the Countess, and begged her to take his wife home. He himself took Joseph's horse, leaving the man to walk back to the chateau, and galloped off to intercept the woman who had killed his dog, and if possible to surprise her with the bloodstained billhook and the tool with which she made the holes in the trees. Blondet took his place between Mme. de Montcornet and Olympe Michaud, and told them of Prince's end, and of the miserable discovery to which it had led.

"Oh dear!" cried the Countess, "let us tell the General about it before breakfast, or anger may kill him."

"I will break the news to him," said Blondet.

"They have killed the dog!" cried Olympe, drying her tears.

"You must have been very fond of Prince, dear child, to shed tears for a dog like this," said the Countess.

"I look upon Prince's death simply as a warning of trouble to come; I am afraid lest anything should happen to my husband."

"How they have spoiled this morning for us!" said the Countess, with an adorable little pout.

"How they are spoiling the country!" Olympe said sadly.

At the park gates they came upon the General.

"Where can you have been?" asked he.

"You shall hear directly," said Blondet mysteriously, as

he helped Mme. Michaud to alight. The General was struck by the sadness in Olympe's face.

A few minutes later, Blondet and the General stood on the terrace.

"You have plenty of moral courage," said Émile Blondet; "you will not fly into a passion, will you?"

"No," said the General, "but out with it, or I shall think that you want to laugh at me."

"Do you see those trees with the dead leaves on them?"

"Yes."

"And those others that are turning a lighter color?"

"Yes."

"Very well, those are so many dead trees; so many trees killed by the peasants whom you thought that you had won over by your kindness"; and Blondet told the tale of that morning's adventures.

The General grew so pale that Blondet was alarmed.

"Come," he cried, "curse and swear, fly into a rage!—repression may perhaps be even worse for you than an outbreak of anger."

"I shall go and smoke," said the Count, and off he went to his summer-house.

Michaud came as they sat at breakfast; he had found nobody. The Count had sent for Sibilet, and he also appeared.

"Monsieur Sibilet and Monsieur Michaud, let it be known in the right quarters that I will give a thousand francs to anybody who will enable me to detect at their work those who injure my trees. The tool with which they work must be discovered, and the place where it was purchased, and—I have a plan ready."

"Those people never sell themselves when a crime has been deliberately committed for their own profit," said Sibilet; "for there is no denying that this diabolical invention has been deliberately planned—"

"Yes. But a thousand francs means one or two acres of land."

"We will try," said Sibilet. "For fifteen hundred francs

we shall find a traitor, I will answer for it, more particularly if we keep his secret."

"But we must all, and I most of all, act as though we knew nothing about it," said the Count. "It should rather be you who discover it without my knowledge; they must not know that I know, or we may fall victims to some new combination. More caution is needed with these brigands than with the enemy in time of war."

"Why, this is the enemy," said Blondet. Sibilet gave him a quick furtive glance; he evidently understood the remark, and he went.

"I do not like that Sibilet of yours," Blondet continued, when he had heard the man go out of the house; "he is not to be trusted."

"I have had no reason to complain of him so far," said the General.

Blondet went to write some letters. He had quite lost the careless high spirits of his first visit, and looked anxious and preoccupied. He had no vague forebodings like Mme. Michaud, his was a clear vision of inevitable troubles. To himself he said:

"All this will come to a bad end; and if the General does not make up his mind at once to retire from a battlefield where he is outnumbered, there will be many victims. Who knows whether he himself or his wife will come out safe and sound? Good heavens! to think that she should be exposed to such risks, so adorable, so devoted, so perfect as she is. And he thinks that he loves her! Well, I will share their peril, and if I cannot save them, I will perish with them."

VIII

RUSTIC VIRTUES

AT NIGHTFALL Marie Tonsard was sitting on the edge of a culvert on the Soulanges road, waiting for Bonnébault, who, according to his usual custom, had spent the day at the café. She heard him while he was yet some distance away, and knew from his footsteps that he was drunk, and that he had lost at play, for he used to sing when he had been winning.

"Is that you, Bonnébault?"

"Yes, little girl."

"What is the matter?"

"I have lost twenty-five francs, and they may wring my neck twenty-five times before I shall find them."

"Well, now, there is a way for us to make five hundred," she said in his ear.

"Oh! yes, somebody to be killed; but I have a mind to live—"

"Just hold your tongue. Vaudoyer will give us the money if you will let them catch your mother at a tree—"

"I would rather kill a man than sell my mother. There is your own Grandmother Tonsard; why don't you give her up?"

"If I tried it, father would be angry, he would put a stop to the game."

"That is true. All the same, my mother shall not go to prison.—Poor old soul! she finds me clothes and victuals, how, I do not know. Send her to prison, and by my own doing! I should have neither heart nor bowels. No, no. I shall tell her this evening to leave off barking the trees, lest some one else should sell her."

"Well, father will do as he pleases; I shall tell him that there are five hundred francs to be made, and he will ask grandmother whether she will or no. They would never put an old woman of seventy in prison; and if they do, she will be more comfortable there than in the garret."

"Five hundred francs!—I will speak to mother about it," said Bonnébault. "After all, if that arrangement gives me the money, I will let her have some of it to live upon in prison. She can spin to amuse herself, she will be well fed and have a sound roof over her, and much less trouble than she has at Conches. Good-by till to-morrow, little girl—I have not time to talk to you."

Next morning at five o'clock, as soon as it was light, Bonnébault and his mother rapped at the door of the Grand-I-Vert; old Granny Tonsard was the only person out of bed.

"Marie!" shouted Bonnébault, "it is a bargain!"

"Is that yesterday's affair about the trees?" asked Granny Tonsard. "That is all settled, they are going to catch *me*."

"You, indeed! My boy has M. Rigou's promise for an acre of land for the money"; and the two old women quarrelled as to which of them should be sold by their children. The sound of the dispute roused the house; Tonsard and Bonnébault each took the part of his parent.

"Pull straws for it," suggested La Tonsard, the daughter-in-law.

The straws decided in favor of the Grand-I-Vert.

Three days later, at daybreak, the gendarmes arrested Granny Tonsard in the depths of the forest, and took her away to Ville-aux-Fayes. She was caught in the act by the head-forester, the keepers, and the rural policeman. In her possession they found a cheap file, with which she made an incision in the tree, and a bradawl, with which she made the ring-shaped gash to imitate the insect's track. In the indictment it was stated that this treacherous operation had been performed upon no fewer than sixty trees within a radius of five hundred paces, and Granny Tonsard was committed for trial at the Assizes at Auxerre.

When Michaud saw the old crone at the foot of the tree, he could not help exclaiming:

"These are the people on whom M. le Comte and Mme. la Comtesse heap kindnesses! My word, if my lady would listen to me, she would not portion that Tonsard girl, who is even more worthless than the grandmother."

The old woman turned her gray eyes on Michaud with a viperous glance. And, in fact, when the Count knew the author of the crime, he forbade his wife to give anything to Catherine Tonsard.

"And so much the better, M. le Comte," said Sibilet; "for it has come to my knowledge that Godain bought that field of his three days before Catherine came to speak to my lady. The pair of them evidently counted on the effect of the scene and on her ladyship's compassion. Catherine is quite capable of putting herself in her present case on purpose to ask for the money, for Godain counts for nothing in the business—"

"What people!" said Blondet; "our black sheep in Paris are saints in comparison—"

"Ah, sir," Sibilet broke in, "all sorts of horrible things are done from mercenary motives hereabout. Do you know who it was that betrayed the Tonsard?"

"No—"

"Her granddaughter Marie. Her sister is going to be married, and she is jealous, and so, to settle herself—"

"It is shocking!" said the Count. "Then would they commit a murder?"

"Yes," said Sibilet, "and for a mere nothing. That sort of people set little value on life; they are tired of continual toil. Ah! sir, in out-of-the-way country places things are no better than in Paris, but you would not believe it."

"Then be kind and benevolent to them," said the Countess.

On the evening after Granny Tonsard's arrest, Bonnébault looked in at the Grand-I-Vert, and found the whole Tonsard family in great jubilation.

"Yes, yes," said he, "you may rejoice! I have just heard from Vaudoyer that the Countess is going back on her promise of Godain's thousand francs. Her husband will not allow her to give the money."

"It is that rascal Michaud who gave the advice," said Tonsard; "mother overheard him. She told me about it at Ville-aux-Fayes when I went over to take all her things and some money. Well and good, let her keep her thousand francs; our five hundred francs will go part of the way toward paying for Godain's land, and we will have our revenge, Godain, you and I. Aha! so Michaud interferes in our little affairs, does he? He will get more harm than good that way. —What does it matter to him, I ask you? Did it happen in his woods? And besides, it was he that raised all this racket. That is as true as 'tis that he found out the trick that day when mother slit the dog's gullet. And how if I in my turn begin to meddle in matters at the chateau? How if I bring the General word that his wife goes out walking in the woods of a morning with a young man no matter for the dew; one had need have warm feet to do that—"

"The General! the General!" broke in Courtecuisse, "any one can do as they like with *him;* it is Michaud who puts him up to things, a fussy fellow who does not understand his own trade. Things went quite otherwise in my time."

"Ah!" said Tonsard, "those were fine times for us all, Vaudoyer, were they not?"

"The fact is," replied Vaudoyer, "that if an end was made of Michaud, we should live in peace."

"That is enough prattle," said Tonsard; "we will talk about this seriously later on, by moonlight, out in the open."

Toward the end of October the Countess went back to town and left the General at the Aigues. He was not prepared to follow for some time to come, but she was unwilling to lose the opening of the opera season at the Théâtre-Italien; and, moreover, she felt lonely and dull now that Émile had left them, for his society had helped her to pass

the time while the General went about the country and saw to his affairs.

Winter set in in earnest with November, the weather was gray and gloomy with spells of cold thaw, rain, and snow. Granny Tonsard's trial came on, witnesses must make the journey to Auxerre, and Michaud went to make his deposition. M. Rigou was seized with pity for the old woman, and found her counsel, a barrister who dwelt in his defence on the fact that all the witnesses for the prosecution were interested parties, while there were no witnesses for the defence; but the evidence given by Michaud and the keepers was corroborated by the rural policeman and two of the gendarmes. This decided the day, and Tonsard's mother was sentenced to five years' imprisonment.

"Michaud's evidence did it all," the barrister told Tonsard.

IX

THE CATASTROPHE

ONE SATURDAY evening, Courtecuisse, Bonnébault, Godain, Tonsard, and his wife and daughters, Daddy Fourchon, Vaudoyer, and a few laborers sat at supper at the Grand-I-Vert. Outside there was a dim moon, and a frost of the kind that dries the ground. The first fallen snow had melted and frozen, so that a man walking over the land left no tell-tale footprints to put the pursuit of justice on his track. The hares for the stew off which they were supping had been caught in traps. The whole party were laughing and drinking, for it was the morrow of Catherine Godain's wedding, and they were going to bring the bride home. Godain's new house was not far from Courtecuisse's little farm; for when Rigou sold an acre of land, he took care to sell an isolated plot somewhere on the edge of the woods.

Courtecuisse and Vaudoyer had come with their guns to escort the bride. The whole countryside was sleeping; there was not a light to be seen. Only the wedding party were awake, and their boisterous mirth was at its loudest when Bonnébault's old mother came in. At that hour of night every one looked up in surprise at her, but she spoke in a low voice to Tonsard and her own son.

"It looks as if the wife's time had come," she said. "*He* has just had his horse saddled; he is going to Soulanges for Dr. Gourdon."

"Sit you down, mother," said Tonsard, and, resigning his seat at the table, he laid himself at full length on a bench.

As he did so, they heard a horse pass by at full gallop along the road. Tonsard, Courtecuisse, and Vaudoyer went at once to the door, and saw Michaud riding through the village.

"How well he understands his business!" said Courtecuisse; "he went round past the front of the château, he is taking the Blangy road, it is the safest—"

"Yes," said Tonsard, "but he will bring Dr. Gourdon back with him."

"Perhaps he will not find him at home," objected Courtecuisse; "Dr. Gourdon was expected at Conches for the postmistress, who is putting people out at this time of night."

"Why, then he will go by the highroad from Soulanges to Conches, that is the shortest way."

"And the surest for us," said Courtecuisse; "there is a bright moonlight just now. There are no keepers along the highroad as there are in the woods; you can hear anybody a long way off; and from the lodge gates there, behind the hedges, just where the coppice begins, you can hit a man in the back, as if he were a rabbit, at five hundred paces—"

"It will be half-past eleven before he goes past the place," said Tonsard. "It will take him half an hour to reach Soulanges, and another half hour to come back. . . . Look here though, boys, suppose that M. Gourdon was on the road—"

"Don't trouble yourself," said Courtecuisse; "I shall be

ten minutes' distance away from you on the direct road to Blangy, on the Soulanges side, and Vaudoyer will be ten minutes away on the Conches side. If anybody comes along, a post-chaise, the mail coach, or the gendarmes, or anything whatever, we will fire into the earth, a smothered shot."

"And if I miss him?"

"He is right," said Courtecuisse.—"I am a better shot than you are; Vaudoyer, I will go with you. Bonnébault will take my post; he can call out, a shout is easier to hear, and not so suspicious."

The three men went back into the tavern, and they kept up the festivity; but at eleven o'clock Vaudoyer, Courtecuisse, Tonsard, and Bonnébault turned out with their guns, none of the women paying any attention to this. Three-quarters of an hour later, moreover, they came in again, and sat drinking until one o'clock in the morning. Catherine and Marie, with their mother and Bonnébault, had plied the rest of the party with drink, until the miller, the laborers, and the two peasants, like Daddy Fourchon, lay snoring on the floor, when the four set out on their errand. When they came back they shook the sleepers, whom they found as they left them, each in his place.

While this orgy went on, Michaud's household endured the most cruel anxiety. Olympe had been taken with false labor-pains, and her husband had started in all haste to summon the doctor. But the poor woman's pains ceased as soon as Michaud was out of the house. Her mind was full of the possible risks which her husband might be running at that late hour in a hostile country full of determined scoundrels; and so strong was her anguish of soul that for the time being it quelled physical suffering. In vain did her servant tell her again and again that her fears were imaginary; she did not seem to understand the words, and sat by the fireside in her room, listening to every sound without. In an agony of terror, which grew from second to second, she called up the man to give him an order which she did not give. The

poor little woman walked to and fro in feverish agitation. She went to the windows and looked out, she threw them open in spite of the cold, then she went downstairs, opened the door into the yard, and looked out into the distance and listened.

"Nothing—," she said, "nothing yet," and she went up to her room again in despair.

About a quarter-past twelve she cried out, "Here he is; I hear his horse," and went downstairs, followed by the man, who went to open the great gate.

"It is strange," she said; "he has come back by way of Conches and the forest."

She stood like one horror-struck, motionless and dumb. The man shared her dismay; for in the frantic gallop of the horse, and the clank of the empty stirrups, there had been a mysterious sound, which told of something wrong, accompanied by the significant neighing which a horse only gives when alone. Soon, too soon for the unhappy wife, the horse reached the park gate, panting and covered with foam, but the horse was riderless, and the bridle, which doubtless had hindered his flight, was broken. Olympe watched with haggard eyes as the man opened the gate, saw the empty saddle, and without a word turned and fled to the château like one distraught. She reached the house and fell beneath the General's windows with the cry—

"Monsieur! they have murdered him!"

Her shriek was so terrible that it woke the Count; he rang the bell and roused the household. The moans of Mme. Michaud, who was delivered of a stillborn child as she lay on the earth, brought out the General and the servants. They raised up the unhappy dying woman. "They have killed him!" she said when she saw the General, and died with the words on her lips.

"Joseph!" the Count called to his man, "run and fetch the doctor! Perhaps it is not too late.—No; you had better go for M. le Curé, she is dead, poor woman, and the child is dead.—Great heavens! what a mercy that my wife is not

here! Go and see what has happened," he added, turning to the gardener.

"This has happened," said the man from the hunting-lodge, "M. Michaud's horse has come back without him, the bridle is cut, there is blood on his legs. There is a drop of blood on the saddle."

"What can we do to-night?" said the Count. "Go and call up Groison, find the keepers, saddle the horses, and we will beat up the country."

In the gray light of the morning, eight men—the Count, Groison, the three keepers, and two gendarmes, who had come over from Soulanges with the quartermaster—were out searching the country; but it was midday before they found the dead body of the head-forester, in a coppice about five hundred paces from the Conches gate, in the corner of the park between the highroad and the road to Ville-aux-Fayes.

Two gendarmes were despatched—one to Ville-aux-Fayes for the public prosecutor, and the other to the justice of the peace at Soulanges—and meanwhile the General drew up a report with the assistance of the quartermaster. There were marks in the road opposite the park gates where the horse had swerved and reared, and deep dints made by the hoofs of the runaway continued as far as the first foot-path into the wood beyond the hedge. The animal had taken the shortest way back to the stable. A bullet was lodged in Michaud's back, and the spine was broken.

Groison and the quartermaster went all over the ground round about the spot where the horse had reared, the "scene of the murder," as it is called in criminal reports, but with all their sagacity they could discover no clew. The ground was frozen so hard that there was not a sign of the footprints of Michaud's murderer, and a spent cartridge was the only thing which they found.

When the public prosecutor arrived with the examining magistrate and Dr. Gourdon, and the body was removed for the post-mortem examination, it was ascertained that the

ball, which corresponded with the waste cartridge, was a regulation bullet discharged from a rifle, and that there was not a single rifle in the commune of Blangy. That evening at the château the examining magistrate and M. Soudry, the public prosecutor, were of the opinion that these facts should be put in the form of a report, and that they had better wait. The lieutenant from Ville-aux-Fayes and the quartermaster were of the same mind.

"The shot must have been fired by somebody belonging to the neighborhood," said the quartermaster, "but there are two communes in the case, and there are five or six men in Conches and Blangy who are quite capable of the act.—Tonsard, whom I should suspect the most, spent the night in drinking. Why, Langlumé the miller, your deputy, General, was of the wedding party; he was there the whole time. They were so drunk that they could not stand upright, and they brought the bride home at half-past one, while it is evident from the return of Michaud's horse that he was murdered between eleven and twelve o'clock. At a quarter-past ten Groison saw the whole party at table, M. Michaud went that way to Soulanges, and he was in Soulanges by eleven o'clock. His horse swerved and pawed the ground on the road by the lodge gates, but Michaud might have received the shot before he reached Blangy, and have held on for some time afterward. Warrants must be issued for twenty persons at the least, and every one under suspicion must be arrested; but these gentlemen know the peasants as well as I do; you may keep them in prison for a year, and you will get nothing out of them but denials. What do you mean to do with the party in Tonsard's place?"

Langlumé, the miller and deputy mayor, was summoned, and he gave his version of the evening's events. They were all in the tavern, he said, no one left it except to go into the yard for a few minutes. He himself had gone out with Tonsard about eleven o'clock; something was said about the moon and the weather; they had heard nothing. He gave the names of all the party, not one of them had left the place,

and toward two o'clock in the morning they had gone home with the newly married couple.

The General and the public prosecutor, taking counsel with the lieutenant and the quartermaster, determined to send to Paris for a clever detective, who should come to the château as a workman, and be turned away for bad conduct. He should drink and assiduously frequent the Grand-I-Vert, and hang about the country in discontent with the General. It was the best way of lying in wait to catch a chance indiscretion.

"I will discover poor Michaud's murderer in the end if I should have to spend twenty thousand francs over it!" General Montcornet never wearied of repeating those words.

He went to Paris with this idea in his head, and returned in the month of January with one of the cleverest detectives in the force, who came ostensibly as foreman of the work at the château, and took to poaching. Formal complaints were made by the keepers, and the General turned him away. In February the Comte de Montcornet returned to Paris.

X

THE VICTORY OF THE VANQUISHED

ONE EVENING in May, when summer weather had come, and the Parisians had returned to the Aigues, M. de Troisville, whom his daughter had brought with her, Blondet, the Abbé Brossette, the General, and the sub-prefect from Ville-aux-Fayes, who had come on a visit, were playing at whist and chess. It was half-past eleven o'clock when Joseph came in to tell his master that the bad workman who had been dismissed wished to speak with him; the man said that the General still owed him money. He was very drunk, the valet reported.

"All right, I will go out to him," said the General, and he went out on the lawn at some distance from the house.

"M. le Comte, there is nothing to be made of these people," said the detective. "All that I can find out is simply this—that if you stay here and persist in trying to break the people of the bad habits which they were allowed to contract in Mlle. Laguerre's time, the next shot will be fired at *you*. I can do nothing more here after this; they suspect me even more than your keepers."

The Count paid the detective, and the man took his leave; his departure only confirmed previous suspicions of the perpetrators of the crime. When the General went back to join the party in the drawing-room, his face bore traces of such deep and keen emotion that his wife came to him anxiously asking for news.

"Dearest," he said, "I do not want to frighten you, and yet it is right that you should know that Michaud's death was meant for an indirect warning to us to quit—"

"For my own part," said M. de Troisville, "I should not think of going. I had these same difficulties in Normandy under another form; I persisted, and now everything goes well."

"Normandy and Burgundy are two different countries, my lord Marquis," said the sub-prefect. "The fruit of the vine is more heating to the blood than the fruit of the apple-tree. We are not so learned here in legal quibbles, and we are surrounded by forests; we have as yet few industries; we are savages, in fact. If I have any advice to give to M. le Comte, it is this—to sell his land and invest the money in the funds. He would double his income, and he would not have the slightest trouble. If he has a liking for a country life, he can have an estate near Paris, a château as fine as the château of the Aigues, a park inclosed by walls which no one will climb, and farms which he can let to tenants who will come in a cabriolet to pay their rents with bank-notes. He will not need to make out a single summons in twelve months. He can go and come in three or four hours.—And, then, Mme. la Comtesse, M. Blondet and my lord Marquis would visit you more frequently—"

"Shall *I* fly before the peasants, I, who stood my ground on the Danube?"

"Yes, but where are your Cuirassiers?" asked Blondet.

"Such a fine estate—"

"It will fetch more than two millions of francs to-day."

"The château alone must have cost as much," said M. de Troisville.

"One of the finest properties for twenty leagues round," said the sub-prefect, "but you will find better near Paris."

"What would two million francs bring in, invested in the funds?" inquired the Countess.

"At the present time, about forty thousand francs," said Blondet.

"The Aigues would not bring you in more than thirty thousand all told," said the Countess, "and then of late years you have spent an immense amount upon it, you have had ditches made round the woods."

"You can have a royal château just now on the outskirts of Paris for four hundred thousand francs. You reap the benefit of other people's follies."

"I thought that you were fond of the Aigues," the Count said to his wife.

"But do you not feel that your life is a thousand times more to me than the Aigues?" said she. "And besides, since the death of poor Olympe and Michaud's murder, the country has grown hateful to me. I seem to see threats and a sinister expression in every face."

The next morning, when the sub-prefect came into M. Gaubertin's drawing-room at Ville-aux-Fayes, the mayor greeted him with—"Well, M. des Lupeaulx, have you come from the Aigues?"

"Yes," said the sub-prefect, with a shade of triumph in his manner. He shot a tender glance at Mlle. Élise as he added, "I am afraid that we are going to lose the General; he is about to sell his estate—"

"M. Gaubertin, I beg of you not to forget my lodge—I cannot bear the noise and dust of Ville-aux-Fayes any

longer; like some poor imprisoned bird, I gasp for the air of the far-off fields and woods," drawled Madame Isaure, her eyes half closed, her head thrown back over her left shoulder, while she languidly twisted her long pale ringlets.

"Pray be careful, madame!" said Gaubertin, lowering his voice, "your babbling will not buy the lodge for us—"

Then he turned to the sub-prefect—

"So they still cannot find the perpetrators of the crime committed on the person of the head-forester?" he inquired.

"It seems that they cannot," replied the sub-prefect.

"That will injure the sale of the Aigues very much," announced Gaubertin to all who heard him; "for my own part, I would not buy the place, I know. The peasants are too troublesome. Even in Mlle. Laguerre's time I used to have trouble with them, though the Lord knows that she allowed them latitude enough."

The month of May was drawing to a close, and there was nothing indicated that the General meant to sell the Aigues. He was hesitating. One night about ten o'clock he was returning from the forest by one of the six avenues which led to the hunting lodge; he was so near home that he had dismissed the keeper who went with him. At a turn in the avenue a man armed with a rifle came out from a bush.

"General," he said, "this is the third time that I have had you close to the muzzle of my gun, and this makes the third time that I have given you your life."

"And why should you want to kill me, Bonnébault," said the Count, without a sign of flinching.

"Faith! if I did not, it would be somebody else; and, you see, I myself have a liking for those who served under the Emperor, and I cannot make up my mind to shoot you like a partridge. Don't ask me about it; I don't mean to say anything.—But you have enemies who are more cunning and stronger than you are, and they will crush you at

last. I am to have three thousand francs if I kill you, and I shall marry Marie Tonsard. Well, give me a few acres of waste and a cabin; I will go on saying, as I have said before, that I have not found an opportunity. You shall have time to sell your place and go away, but be quick. I am a good fellow still, scapegrace though I am; somebody else might do you a mischief."

"And if I give you your demands," said the General, "will you tell me who it was that promised you the three thousand crowns?"

"I do not know; some one is pushing me on to do this, but I am too fond of that person to mention names. . . . And if I did, and if you knew that it was Marie Tonsard, you would be no further. Marie would be as mute as a wall, and I should deny my words."

"Come and see me to-morrow," said the General.

"That is enough," said Bonnébault; "if they think that I am bungling the business, I will let you know."

A week after this strange conversation, the district, the whole department—nay, Paris itself—was flooded with huge placards, wherein it was set forth that the Aigues was to be put up for sale in lots; applications to be made to Maître Corbinet, notary, Soulanges. All the lots were knocked down to Rigou, the total amount paid being two million one hundred and fifty thousand francs.

On the morrow of the sale the names of the buyers were changed. M. Gaubertin took the forest, Rigou and Soudry had the vineyards and the rest of the estate. The château and the park were resold to the Black Band, to be pulled down for building materials; only the hunting-lodge, with its dependencies, was allowed to stand—M. Gaubertin reserved it as a present for his poetical and sentimental spouse.

Many years went by. During the winter of 1837, Émile Blondet, one of the most remarkable political writers of the

time, had reached the lowest depth of poverty, which he had hitherto concealed beneath the brilliant and elegant surface of his life. He was hesitating on the brink of a desperate resolve; he saw that his work, his wit and knowledge of men and affairs, had ended in naught, that he was a machine working for the benefit of others. He saw that all places were filled; he felt that he was growing older, and knew that he had neither wealth nor position. The place-men and incapables of the Restoration had succeeded to the bourgeois imbeciles and incapables, and the Government was reconstituted as it had been before 1830. One evening, when suicide, at which he had scoffed so often, was hovering in his thoughts, he glanced finally over his unlucky life, in which work had filled a far larger space than the dissipation which slander imputed to him, and saw the fair and noble face of a woman rise out of the past, like a stainless and unbroken marble statue amid the dreariest ruins. His porter brought him a letter with a black seal. The Comtesse de Montcornet wrote to inform him of the death of her husband, who had returned to the army, and again commanded a division. She was his heir; she had no children. That letter, in spite of its womanly dignity, told Blondet that the woman of forty, whom he had loved in his youth, held out a comrade's hand to him and a considerable fortune.

Shortly afterward a marriage took place between the Comtesse de Montcornet and M. Blondet, a newly-appointed prefect. He went to his prefecture by the route on which the Aigues formerly lay, and stopped the travelling carriage opposite the place where the park gates used to stand, to see once more the commune of Blangy, so thronged with tender memories for them both. The country was no longer recognizable. The mysterious woods, the avenues in the park, had been cleared away, the country looked like a tailor's chart of patterns. The Peasantry had taken possession of the soil as conquerors and by right of conquest; already it had been divided up into more than

a thousand holdings; already the population of Blangy had trebled itself. The once beautiful park—so carefully ordered, so luxuriantly fair—was now an agricultural district, with one familiar building standing out in strong contrast against the changed background. This was the hunting-lodge, re-christened Il Buen-Retiro by Mme. Isaure Gaubertin, who had converted it into a villa residence. The building looked almost like a château, so miserable were the peasants' cabins scattered round about it.

"Behold the march of progress!" cried Émile. "Here is a page from Jean-Jacques' 'Contrat Social.' And here am I, in harness, a part of the social machinery which brings about such results as these! Good heavens! what will become of kings in a little while? Nay, what will become of the nations themselves in fifty years' time, if this state of things continues?"

"You love me—you are at my side. . . . The present is very fair for me, and I hardly care to think of such a far-off future," his wife answered.

"With you beside me, long live the Present! and the devil take the Future!" cried the enraptured Blondet.

He made a sign to the man, the horses sprang forward at a gallop, and the newly-wedded lovers resumed the course of their honeymoon.

The author of "The Peasantry" should be allowed to be sufficiently learned in the history of his own times to know that there never were any Cuirassiers of the Imperial Guard. He takes the liberty of stating here that he has in his study the uniforms of the Republic, the Empire, and the Restoration; a complete collection of the military costumes of every country which has fought with France as an enemy or as an ally; and more military works on the wars of 1792–1815 than any Marshal of France. He takes the opportunity, through the medium of the press, of thanking those persons who have honored him by taking a sufficient interest in his work to correct his mistakes and send him information.

Once for all, he here states in reply that these inaccuracies

are deliberately and designedly made. The story is not a *Scène de la Vie Militaire*, in which an author is bound not to equip his infantrymen with sabre-taches. Every attempt to deal with contemporary history, even through contemporary types, has its dangers. It is only by making use of a general scheme, in which all the details are minutely true, and all the facts severally altered by giving an unfamiliar color to them, that the petty reef of "personalities" can be avoided in fiction. In a previous case ("Une Ténébreuse Affaire"), although the facts belonged to history and the details had been altered, the author was compelled to reply to ridiculous objections raised on the ground that there was but *one* senator kidnapped and confined in the time of the Empire. I quite believe it! Possibly he who should have abducted a second senator would have been crowned with flowers.

If this inaccuracy with regard to the Cuirassiers is too shocking, it is easy to suppress the mention of the Guard; though, in that case, the family of the illustrious General who commanded the regiment of horse which was pushed down to the edge of the Danube, might ask us to account for those eleven hundred thousand francs which the Emperor allowed Montcornet to save in Pomerania.

We shall soon be requested to give the name of the geography book in which Ville-aux-Fayes and the Avonne and Soulanges are to be found. Let it be said that all these places, and the Cuirassiers of the Guard likewise, are to be found on those shores where the Master of Ravenswood's tower stands; there you will find Saint Ronan's Well and the lands of Tillietudlem and Gandercleugh and Liliput and the Abbey of Thelema, and Hoffmann's privy councillors, and Robinson Crusoe's Island, and the estates of the Shandy Family; in that world no taxes are paid, and those who fain would make the voyage may travel thither post, at the rate of twenty centimes a volume.

AUTHOR'S NOTE.

THE COUNTRY PARSON

PREFACE

PERHAPS in no instance of Balzac's work is his singular fancy for pulling that work about more remarkably instanced and illustrated than in the case of "Le Curé de Village." The double date, 1837–1845, which the author attached to it, in his usual conscientious manner, to indicate these revisions, has a greater signification than almost anywhere else. When the book, or rather its constituent parts, first appeared in the "Presse" for 1839, having been written the winter before, not only was it very different in detail, but the order of the parts was altogether dissimilar. Balzac here carried out his favorite plan—a plan followed by many other authors no doubt, but always, as it seems to me, of questionable wisdom —that of beginning in the middle and then "throwing back" with a long retrospective and explanatory digression.

In this version the story of Tascheron's crime and its punishment came first; and it was not till after the execution that the early history of Véronique (who gave her name to this part as to a "Suite du Curé de Village") was introduced. This history ceased at the crisis of her life; and when it was taken up in a third part, called "Véronique au Tombeau," only the present conclusion of the book, with her confession, was given. The long account of her sojourn at Montignac, of her labors there, of the episode of Farrabesche, and so forth, did not appear till 1841, when the whole book, with the inversions and insertions just indicated, appeared in such a changed form that even the indefatigable M. de Lovenjoul dismisses as "impossible" the idea of exhibiting a complete picture of the various changes made. Nor was the author even yet contented; for in 1845, before establishing it in its

place in the "Comédie," he not only, as was his wont, took out the chapter-headings, leaving five divisions only, but introduced other alterations, resulting in the present condition of the book.

It is not necessary to dwell very much on the advantages or disadvantages of these changes. There is no doubt that, as has been said above, the trick of beginning the story in the middle, and then doubling back on the start, has many drawbacks. But, on the other hand, that of an introduction which has apparently very little to do with anything, and which has nothing whatever to do with the title of the book, has others; and I do not know that in the final reconstitution Balzac has made Véronique's part in the matter, even in her confession, as clear as it should be. It is indeed almost unavoidable that twisting and turning the shape of a story about, as he was wont to do, should bring the penalty of destroying, or at least damaging, its unity.

As the book stands it may be said to consist of three parts united rather by identity of the personages who act in them than by exact dramatic connection. There is, to take the title-part first (though it is by no means the most really important or pervading), the picture of the "Curé de Village," which is almost an exact, and beyond doubt a designed, pendant to that of the "Médecin de Campagne." The Abbé Bonnet indeed is not able to carry out economic ameliorations, as Dr. Benassis is, personally, but by inducing Véronique to do so he brings about the same result and on an even larger scale. His personal action (with the necessary changes for his profession) is also tolerably identical, and on the whole the two portraits may fairly be hung together as Balzac's ideal representations of the good man in soul-curing and body-curing respectively. Both are largely conditioned by his eighteenth-century fancy for "playing Providence," and by his delight in extensive financial-commercial schemes. I believe that in both books these schemes have been stumbling-blocks, if not to all readers, yet to a good many. But the beauty of the portraiture of the "Curé" is nearly, if not

quite equal, to that of the doctor, though the institution of celibacy has prevented Balzac from giving a key to the conduct of Bonnet quite as sufficient as that which he furnished for the conduct of Benassis.

The second part of the book is the crime—episodic as regards the criminal, cardinal as regards other points—of Tascheron. Balzac was very fond of "his crimes"; and it is quite worth while in connection with his handling of the murder here to study the curious story of his actual interference in the famous Peytel case, which also interested Thackeray so much in his Paris days. The Tascheron case itself (which from a note appears to have been partly suggested by some actual affair) no doubt has interests for those who like such things, and the picture of the criminal in prison is very striking. But we see and know so very little of Tascheron himself, and even to the very last (which is long afterward) we are left so much in the dark as to his love for Véronique that the thing has an extraneous air. It is like a short story foisted in.

This objection connects itself at once with a similar one to the delineation of Véronique. There is nothing in her conduct intrinsically impossible, or even improbable. A girl of her temperament, at once, as often happens, strongly sensual and strongly devotional, deprived of her good looks by illness, thrown into the arms of a husband physically repulsive, and after a short time not troubling himself to be amiable in any other way, might very well take refuge in the substantial, if not ennobling, consolations offered by a good-looking and amiable young fellow of the lower class. Her conduct at the time of the crime (her exact complicity in which is, as we have said, rather imperfectly indicated) is also fairly probable, and to her repentance and amendment of life no exception can be taken. But only in this last stage do we really *see* anything of the inside of Véronique's nature; and even then we do not see it completely. The author's silence on the details of the actual *liaison* with Tascheron has its advantages, but it also has its defects.

Still, the book is one of great attraction and interest, and takes, if I may judge by my own experience, a high rank for enchaining power among that class of Balzac's books which cannot be put exactly highest. If the changes made in it by its author have to some extent dislocated it as a whole, they have resulted in very high excellence for almost all the parts.

As something has necessarily been said already about the book-history of the "Curé de Village," little remains but to give exact dates and places of appearance. The "Presse" published the (original) first part in December-January, 1838–39, the original second ("Véronique") six months later, and the third ("Véronique au Tombeau") in August. All had chapters and chapter-titles. As a book it was in its first complete form published by Souverain in 1841, and was again altered when it took rank in the "Comédie" six years later.

THE COUNTRY PARSON

I

VÉRONIQUE

AT THE LOWER END of Limoges, at the corner of the Rue de la Vieille-Poste and the Rue de la Cité, there stood, some thirty years back, an old-fashioned shop of the kind that seems to have changed in nothing since the Middle Ages. The great stone paving-slabs, riven with countless cracks, were laid upon the earth; the damp oozed up through them here and there; while the heights and hollows of this primitive flooring would have tripped up those who were not careful to observe them. Through the dust on the walls it was possible to discern a sort of mosaic of timber and bricks, iron and stone, a heterogeneous mass which owed its compact solidity to time, and perhaps to chance. For more than two centuries the huge rafters of the ceiling had bent without breaking beneath the weight of the upper stories, which were constructed of wooden framework, protected from the weather by slates arranged in a geometrical pattern; altogether, it was a quaint example of a burgess's house in olden times. Once there had been carved figures on the wooden window-frames, but sun and rain had destroyed the ornaments, and the windows themselves stood all awry; some bent outward, some bent in, yet others were minded to part company, and one and all carried a little soil deposited (it would be hard to say how) in crannies hollowed by the rain, where a few shy creeping plants and thin weeds grew to break into meagre blossom in

the spring. Velvet mosses covered the roof and the window-sills.

The pillar which supported the corner of the house, built though it was of composite masonry, that is to say, partly of stone, partly of brick and flints, was alarming to behold by reason of its curvature; it looked as though it must give way some day beneath the weight of the superstructure whose gable projected fully six inches. For which reason the Local Authorities and the Board of Works bought the house and pulled it down to widen the street. The venerable corner pillar had its charms for lovers of old Limoges; it carried a pretty sculptured shrine and a mutilated image of the Virgin, broken during the Revolution. Citizens of an archeological turn could discover traces of the stone sill meant to hold candlesticks and to receive wax tapers and flowers and votive offerings of the pious.

Within the shop a wooden staircase at the further end gave access to the two floors above and to the attics in the roof. The house itself, packed in between two neighboring dwellings, had little depth from back to front, and no light save from the windows which gave upon the street, the two rooms on each floor having a window apiece, one looking out into the Rue de la Vieille-Poste, and the other into the Rue de la Cité. In the Middle Ages no artisan was better housed. The old corner shop must surely have belonged to some armorer or cutler, or master of some craft which could be carried on in the open air, for it was impossible for its inmates to see until the heavily ironed shutters were taken down and air as well as light freely admitted. There were two doors (as is usually the case where a shop faces into two streets), one on either side the pillar. But for the interruption of the white threshold stones, hollowed by the wear of centuries, the whole shop front consisted of a low wall which rose to elbow height. Along the top of this wall a groove had been contrived, and a similar groove ran the length of the beam above, which supported the weight of the house wall. Into these grooves slid the heavy shutters, secured by

huge iron bolts and bars; and when the doorways had been made fast in like manner, the artisan's workshop was as good as a fortress.

For the first twenty years of this present century the Limousins had been accustomed to see the interior filled up with old iron and brass, cart-springs, tires, bells, and every sort of metal from the demolition of houses; but the curious in the débris of the old town discovered, on a closer inspection, the traces of a forge in the place and a long streak of soot, signs which confirmed the guesses of archeologists as to the original purpose of the dwelling. On the first floor there was a living room and a kitchen, two more rooms on the second, and an attic in the roof, which was used as a warehouse for goods more fragile than the hardware tumbled down pell-mell in the shop.

The house had been first let and then sold to one Sauviat, a hawker, who from 1792 till 1796 travelled in Auvergne for a distance of fifty leagues round, bartering pots, plates, dishes, and glasses, all the gear, in fact, needed by the poorest cottagers, for old iron, brass, lead, and metal of every sort and description. The Auvergnat would give a brown earthen pipkin worth a couple of sous for a pound weight of lead or a couple of pounds of iron, a broken spade or hoe, or an old cracked saucepan; and was always judge in his own cause, and gave his own weights. In three years' time Sauviat took another trade in addition, and became a tinman.

In 1793 he was able to buy a chateau put up for sale by the nation. This he pulled down; and doubtless repeated a profitable experiment at more than one point in his sphere of operations. After a while these first essays of his gave him an idea; he suggested a piece of business on a large scale to a fellow-countryman in Paris; and so it befell that the *Black Band*, so notorious for the havoc which it wrought among old buildings, was a sprout of old Sauviat's brain, the invention of the hawker whom all Limoges had seen for seven-and-twenty years in his tumbledown shop among his broken bells, flails, chains, brackets, twisted leaden gutters,

and heterogeneous old iron. In justice to Sauviat, it should be said that he never knew how large and how notorious the association became; he only profited by it to the extent of the capital which he invested with the famous firm of Brézac

At last the Auvergnat grew tired of roaming from fair to fair and place to place, and settled down in Limoges, where, in 1797, he had married a wife, the motherless daughter of a tinman, Champagnac by name. When the father-in-law died, he bought the house in which he had, in a manner, localized his trade in old iron, though for some three years after his marriage he had still made his rounds, his wife accompanying him. Sauviat had completed his fiftieth year when he married old Champagnac's daughter, and the bride herself was certainly thirty years old at the least. Champagnac's girl was neither pretty nor blooming. She was born in Auvergne, and the dialect was a mutual attraction; she was, moreover, of the heavy build which enables a woman to stand the roughest work; so she went with Sauviat on his rounds, carried loads of lead and iron on her back, and drove the sorry carrier's van full of the pottery on which her husband made usurious profits, little as his customers imagined it. La Champagnac was sunburned and high-colored. She enjoyed rude health, exhibiting when she laughed a row of teeth large and white as blanched almonds, and, as to physique, possessed the bust and hips of a woman destined by Nature to be a mother. Her prolonged spinsterhood was entirely due to her father; he had not read Molière, but he raised Harpagon's cry of "*Sans dot!*" which scared suitors. The "*Sans dot*" did not frighten Sauviat away; he was not averse to receiving the bride without a portion; in the first place, a would-be bridegroom of fifty ought not to raise difficulties; and, in the second, his wife saved him the expense of a servant. He added nothing to the furniture of his room. On his wedding day it contained a four-post bedstead hung with green serge curtains and a valance with a scalloped edge; a dresser, a chest of drawers, four easy-chairs, a table, and a looking-glass, all bought at different

times and from different places; and till he left the old house for good, the list remained the same. On the upper shelves of the dresser stood sundry pewter plates and dishes, no two of them alike. After this description of the bedroom, the kitchen may be left to the reader's imagination.

Neither husband nor wife could read, a slight defect of education which did not prevent them from reckoning money to admiration, nor from carrying on one of the most prosperous of all trades, for Sauviat never bought anything unless he felt sure of making a hundred per cent on the transaction, and dispensed with bookkeeping and counting-house by carrying on a ready-money business. He possessed, moreover, a faculty of memory so perfect, that an article might remain for five years in his shop, and at the end of the time both he and his wife could recollect the price they gave for it to a farthing, together with the added interest for every year since the outlay.

Sauviat's wife, when she was not busy about the house, always sat on a rickety wooden chair in her shop door beside the pillar, knitting, and watching the passers-by, keeping an eye on the old iron, and selling, weighing, and delivering it herself if Sauviat was out on one of his journeys. At daybreak you might hear the dealer in old iron taking down the shutters, the dog was let loose into the street, and very soon Sauviat's wife came down to help her husband to arrange their wares. Against the low wall of the shop in the Rue de la Cité and the Rue de la Vieille-Poste, they propped their heterogeneous collection of broken gun barrels, cart springs, and harness bells—all the gimcracks, in short, which served as a trade sign and gave a sufficiently poverty-stricken look to a shop which in reality often contained twenty thousand francs' worth of lead, steel, and bell metal. The retired hawker and his wife never spoke of their money; they hid it as a malefactor conceals a crime, and for a long while were suspected of clipping gold louis and silver crowns.

When old Champagnac died, the Sauviats made no inventory. They searched every corner and cranny of the old

man's house with the quickness of rats, stripped it bare as a corpse, and sold the tinware themselves in their own shop. Once a year, when December came round, Sauviat would go to Paris, travelling in a public conveyance; from which premises, observers in the quarter concluded that the dealer in old iron saw to his investments in Paris himself, so that he might keep the amount of his money a secret. It came out in after years that as a lad Sauviat had known one of the most celebrated metal merchants in Paris, a fellow-countryman from Auvergne, and that Sauviat's savings were invested with the prosperous firm of Brézac, the cornerstone of the famous association of the Black Band, which was started, as has been said, by Sauviat's advice, and in which he held shares.

Sauviat was short and stout. He had a weary-looking face and an honest expression, which attracted customers, and was of no little use to him in the matter of sales. The dryness of his affirmations, and the perfect indifference of his manner, aided his pretensions. It was not easy to guess the color of the skin beneath the black metallic grime which covered his curly hair and countenance seamed with the smallpox. His forehead was not without a certain nobility; indeed, he resembled the traditional type chosen by painters for Saint Peter, the man of the people among the apostles, the roughest among their number, and likewise the shrewdest; Sauviat had the hands of an indefatigable worker, rifted by ineffaceable cracks, square-shaped, and coarse and large. The muscular framework of his chest seemed indestructible. All through his life he dressed like a hawker, wearing the thick iron-bound shoes, the blue stockings which his wife knitted for him, the leather gaiters, breeches of bottle-green velveteen, a coat with short skirts of the same material, and a flapped waistcoat, where the copper key of a silver watch dangled from an iron chain, worn by constant friction till it shone like polished steel. Round his neck he wore a cotton handkerchief, frayed by the constant rubbing of his beard. On Sundays and holidays he appeared in a maroon overcoat

so carefully kept that he bought a new one but twice in a score of years.

As for their manner of living, the convicts in the hulks might be said to fare sumptuously in comparison; it was a day of high festival indeed when they ate meat. Before La Sauviat could bring herself to part with the money needed for their daily sustenance, she rummaged through the two pockets under her skirt, and never drew forth coin that was not clipped or light weight, eying the crowns of six livres and fifty sous pieces dolorously before she changed one of them. The Sauviats contented themselves, for the most part, with herrings, dried peas, cheese, hard-boiled eggs and salad, and vegetables dressed in the cheapest way. They lived from hand to mouth, laying in nothing except a bundle of garlic now and again, or a rope of onions, which could not spoil, and cost them a mere trifle. As for firewood, La Sauviat bought the few sticks which they required in winter of the fagot-sellers day by day. By seven o'clock in winter and nine in summer the shutters were fastened, the master and mistress in bed, and their huge dog, who picked up his living in the kitchens of the quarter, on guard in the shop; Mother Sauviat did not spend three francs a year on candles.

A joy came into their sober, hard-working lives; it was a joy that came in the natural order of things, and caused the only outlay which they had been known to make. In May, 1802, La Sauviat bore a daughter. No one was called in to her assistance, and five days later she was stirring about her house again. She nursed her child herself, sitting on the chair in the doorway, selling her wares as usual, with the baby at her breast. Her milk cost nothing, so for two years she suckled the little one, who was none the worse for it, for little Véronique grew to be the prettiest child in the lower town, so pretty indeed that passers-by would stop to look at her. The neighbors saw in old Sauviat traces of a tenderness of which they had believed him incapable. While the wife made the dinner ready he used to rock the

little one in his arms, crooning the refrain of some Auvergnat song; and the workmen as they passed sometimes saw him sitting motionless, gazing at little Véronique asleep on her mother's knee. His gruff voice grew gentle for the child; he would wipe his hands on his trousers before taking her up. When Véronique was learning to walk, her father squatted on his heels four paces away, holding out his arms to her, gleeful smiles puckering the deep wrinkles on the harsh, stern face of bronze; it seemed as if the man of iron, brass, and lead had once more become flesh and blood. As he stood leaning against the pillar motionless as a statue, he would start at a cry from Véronique, and spring over the iron to find her, for she spent her childhood in playing about among the metallic spoils of old chateaux heaped up in the recesses of the shop, and never hurt herself; and if she played in the street or with the neighbors' children, she was never allowed out of her mother's sight.

It is worth while to add that the Sauviats were eminently devout. Even when the Revolution was at its height Sauviat kept Sundays and holidays punctually. Twice in those days he had all but lost his head for going to hear mass said by a priest who had not taken the oath to the Republic. He found himself in prison at last, justly accused of conniving at the escape of a bishop whose life he had saved; but luckily for the hawker, steel files and iron bars were old acquaintances of his, and he made his escape. Whereupon the Court, finding that he failed to put in an appearance, gave judgment by default, and condemned him to death; and, it may be added, that as he never returned to clear himself, he finally died under sentence of death. In his religious sentiments his wife shared; the parsimonious rule of the household was only relaxed in the name of religion. Punctually the two paid their quota for sacramental bread, and gave money for charity. If the curate of Saint-Étienne came to ask for alms, Sauviat or his wife gave without fuss or hesitation what they believed to be their due share toward the funds of the parish. The broken Virgin on their pillar

was decked with sprays of box when Easter came round; and so long as there were flowers, the passers-by saw that the blue glass bouquet-holders were never empty, and this especially after Véronique's birth. Whenever there was a procession the Sauviats never failed to drape their house with hangings and garlands, and contributed to the erection and adornment of the altar—the pride of their street.

So Véronique was brought up in the Christian faith. As soon as she was seven years old, she was educated by a Gray Sister, an Auvergnate, to whom the Sauviats had rendered some little service; for both of them were sufficiently obliging so long as their time or their substance was not in question, and helpful after the manner of the poor, who lend themselves with a certain heartiness. It was the Franciscan Sister who taught Véronique to read and write; she instructed her pupil in the History of the People of God, in the Catechism and the Old and New Testaments, and, to a certain small extent, in the rules of arithmetic. That was all. The good Sister thought that it would be enough, but even this was too much.

Véronique at nine years of age astonished the quarter by her beauty. Every one admired a face which might one day be worthy of the pencil of some impassioned seeker after an ideal type. "The little Virgin," as they called her, gave promise of being graceful of form and fair of face; the thick, bright hair which set off the delicate outlines of her features completed her resemblance to the Madonna. Those who have seen the divine child-virgin in Titian's great picture of the Presentation in the Temple may know what Véronique was like in these years; she had the same frank innocence of expression, the same look as of a wondering seraph in her eyes, the same noble simplicity, the same queenly bearing.

Two years later, Véronique fell ill of the smallpox, and would have died of it but for Sister Martha, who nursed her. During those two months, while her life was in danger, the quarter learned how tenderly the Sauviats loved their daughter. Sauviat attended no sales, and went nowhere. All day

long he stayed in the shop, or went restlessly up and down the stairs, and he and his wife sat up night after night with the child. So deep was his dumb grief that no one dared to speak to him; the neighbors watched him pityingly, and asked for news of Véronique of no one but Sister Martha. The days came when the child's life hung by a thread, and neighbors and passers-by saw, for the first and only time in Sauviat's life, the slow tears rising under his eyelids and rolling down his hollow cheeks. He never wiped them away. For hours he sat like one stupefied, not daring to go upstairs to the sickroom, staring before him with unseeing eyes; he might have been robbed, and he would not have noticed it.

Véronique's life was saved, not so her beauty. A uniform tint, in which red and brown were evenly blended, overspread her face; the disease left countless little scars which coarsened the surface of the skin, and wrought havoc with the delicate underlying tissues. Nor had her forehead escaped the ravages of the scourge; it was brown, and covered with dints like the marks of hammer strokes. No combination is more discordant than a muddy-brown complexion and fair hair; the pre-established harmony of coloring is broken. Deep irregular seams in the surface had spoiled the purity of her features and the delicacy of the outlines of her face; the Grecian profile, the subtle curves of a chin finely molded as white porcelain, were scarcely discernible beneath the coarsened skin; the disease had only spared what it was powerless to injure—the teeth and eyes. But Véronique did not lose her grace and beauty of form, the full rounded curves of her figure, nor the slenderness of her waist. At fifteen she was a graceful girl, and (for the comfort of the Sauviats) a good girl and devout, hard-working, industrious, always at home.

After her convalescence and first communion, her father and mother arranged for her the two rooms on the second floor. Some glimmering notion of what is meant by comfort passed through old Sauviat's mind; hard fare might do

for him and his wife, but now a dim idea of making compensation for a loss which his daughter had not felt as yet, crossed his brain. Véronique had lost the beauty of which these two had been so proud, and thenceforward became the dearer to them, and the more precious in their eyes.

So one day Sauviat came in, carrying a carpet, a chance purchase, on his back, and this he himself nailed down on the floor of Véronique's room. He went to a sale of furniture at a chateau, and secured for her the red damask-curtained bed of some great lady, and hangings and chairs and easy-chairs covered with the same stuff. Gradually he furnished his daughter's rooms with second-hand purchases, in complete ignorance of the real value of the things. He set pots of mignonette on the window-sill, and brought back flowers for her from his wanderings; sometimes it was a rose-bush, sometimes a tree-carnation, and plants of all kinds, doubtless given to him by gardeners and innkeepers. If Véronique had known enough of other people to draw comparisons, and to understand their manners of life and the characters and the ignorance of her parents, she would have known how great the affection was which showed itself in these little things; but the girl gave her father and mother the love that springs from an exquisite nature—an instinctive and unreasoning love.

Véronique must have the finest linen which her mother could buy, and La Sauviat allowed her daughter to choose her own dresses. Both father and mother were pleased with her moderation; Véronique had no ruinous tastes. A blue silk gown for holiday wear, a winter dress of coarse merino for working days, and a striped cotton gown in summer; with these she was content.

On Sunday she went to mass with her father and mother, and walked with them after vespers along the banks of the Vienne or in the neighborhood of the town. All through the week she stayed in the house, busy over the tapestry-work, which was sold for the benefit of the poor, or the plain sewing for the hospital—no life could be more simple, more

innocent, more exemplary than hers. She had other occupations besides her sewing; she read to herself, but only such books as the curate of Saint-Etienne lent to her. (Sister Martha had introduced the priest to the Sauviat family.)

For Véronique all the laws of the household economy were set aside. Her mother delighted to cook dainty fare for her, and made separate dishes for her daughter. Father and mother might continue, as before, to eat the walnuts and the hard bread, the herrings, and the dried peas fried with a little salt butter; but for Véronique, nothing was fresh enough nor good enough.

"Véronique must be a great expense to you," remarked the hatter who lived opposite. He estimated old Sauviat's fortune at a hundred thousand francs, and had thoughts of Véronique for his son.

"Yes, neighbor; yes, neighbor; yes," old Sauviat answered, "she might ask me for ten crowns, and I should let her have them, I should. She has everything she wants, but she never asks for anything. She is as good and gentle as a lamb!"

And, in fact, Véronique did not know the price of anything; she had no wants; she never saw a piece of gold till the day of her marriage, and had no money of her own; her mother bought and gave to her all that she wished, and even for a beggar she drew upon her mother's pockets.

"Then she doesn't cost you much," commented the hatter.

"That is what you think, is it?" retorted Sauviat. "You wouldn't do it on less than forty crowns a year. You should see her room! There is a hundred crowns' worth of furniture in it; but when you have only one girl, you can indulge yourself; and, after all, what little we have will all be hers some day."

"*Little?* You must be rich, Father Sauviat. These forty years you have been in a line of business where there are no losses."

"Oh, they shouldn't cut my ears off for a matter of twelve hundred francs," said the dealer in old iron.

From the day when Véronique lost the delicate beauty, which every one had admired in her childish face, old Sauviat had worked twice as hard as before. His business revived again, and prospered so well, that he went to Paris not once, but several times a year. People guessed his motives. If his girl had gone off in looks, he would made up for it in money, to use his own language.

When Véronique was about fifteen another change was wrought in the household ways. The father and mother went up to their daughter's room of an evening, and listened while she read aloud to them from the "Lives of the Saints," or the "Lettres édifiantes," or from some other book lent by the curate of Saint-Etienne. The lamp was set behind a glass globe full of water, and Mother Sauviat knitted industriously, thinking in this way to pay for the oil. The neighbors opposite could look into the room and see the two old people sitting there, motionless as two carved Chinese figures, listening intently, admiring their daughter with all the power of an intelligence that was dim enough save in matters of business or religion. Doubtless there have been girls as pure as Véronique—there have been none purer nor more modest. Her confession surely filled the angels with wonder, and gladdened the Virgin in Heaven. She was now sixteen years old, and perfectly developed; you beheld in her the woman she would be. She was of medium height, neither the father nor the mother was tall; but the most striking thing about her figure was its lissome grace, the sinuous, gracious curves which Nature herself traces so finely, which the artist strives so painfully to render; the soft contours that reveal themselves to practiced eyes, for in spite of folds of linen and thickness of stuff, the dress is always molded and informed by the body. Simple, natural, and sincere, Véronique set this physical beauty in relief by her unaffected freedom of movement. She produced her "full and entire effect," if it is permissible to make use of the forcible legal phrase. She had the full-fleshed arms of an Auvergnate, the red, plump hands of a buxom inn-servant, and

feet strongly made, but shapely, and in proportion to her height.

Sometimes there was wrought in her an exquisite mysterious change; suddenly it was revealed that in this frame dwelt a woman hidden from all eyes but Love's. Perhaps it was this transfiguration which awakened an admiration of her beauty in the father and mother, who astonished the neighbors by speaking of it as something divine. The first to see it were the clergy of the cathedral and the communicants at the table of the Lord. When Véronique's face was lighted up by impassioned feeling—and the mystical ecstasy which filled her at such times is one of the strongest emotions in the life of so innocent a girl—it seemed as if a bright inner radiance effaced the traces of the smallpox, and the pure, bright face appeared once more in the first beauty of childhood. Scarcely obscured by the thin veil of tissues coarsened by the disease, her face shone like some flower in dim places under the sea, when the sunlight strikes down and invests it with a mysterious glory. For a few brief moments Véronique was transfigured, the Little Virgin appeared and disappeared like a vision from Heaven. The pupils of her eyes, which possessed in a high degree the power of contracting, seemed at such seasons to dilate and overspread the blue of the iris, which diminished till it became nothing more than a slender ring; the change in the eyes, which thus grew piercing as the eagle's, completing the wonderful change in the face. Was it a storm of repressed and passionate longing, was it some power which had its source in the depths of her nature, which made those eyes dilate in broad daylight as other eyes widen in shadow, darkening their heavenly blue? Whatever the cause, it was impossible to look upon Véronique with indifference as she returned to her place after having been made one with God; all present beheld her in the radiance of her early beauty; at such times she would have eclipsed the fairest women in her loveliness. What a charm for a jealous lover in that veil of flesh which should hide his love from all other eyes; a veil which the hand of

Love could raise to let fall again upon the rapture of wedded bliss. Véronique's lips, faultless in their curves, seemed to have been painted scarlet, so richly were they colored by the pure glow of the blood. Her chin and the lower part of her face were a little full, in the sense that painters give to the word, and this heaviness of contour is, by the unalterable laws of physiognomy, a certain sign of a capacity for almost morbid violence of passion. Her finely molded but almost imperious brow was crowned by a glorious diadem of thick abundant hair; the gold had deepened to a chestnut tint.

From her sixteenth year till the day of her marriage Véronique's demeanor was thoughtful and full of melancholy. In an existence so lonely she fell, as solitary souls are wont, to watching the grand spectacle of the life within, the progress of her thoughts, the ever-changing phantasmagoria of mental visions, the yearnings kindled by her pure life. Those who passed along the Rue de la Cité on sunny days had only to look up to see the Sauviats' girl sitting at her window with a bit of sewing or embroidery in her hand, drawing the needle in and out with a somewhat dreamy air. Her head stood out in sharp contrast against its background among the flowers which gave a touch of poetry to the prosaic, cracked, brown window-sill, and the small leaded panes of her casement. At times a reflected glow from the red damask curtains added to the effect of the face so brightly colored already; it looked like some rosy-red flower above the little skyey garden, which she tended so carefully upon the ledge. So the quaint old house contained something still more quaint—a portrait of a young girl, worthy of Mieris, Van Ostade, Terburg, or Gerard Dow, framed in one of the old, worn, blackened, and almost ruinous windows which Dutch artists loved to paint. If a stranger happened to glance up at the second floor, and stand agape with wonder at its construction, old Sauviat below would thrust out his head till he could look up the face of the overhanging story. He was sure to see Véronique there at the window. Then he would go in again, rubbing his hands, and say to his wife

in the patois of Auvergne—"Hullo, old woman, there is some one admiring your daughter!"

In 1820 an event occurred in Véronique's simple and uneventful life. It was a little thing, which would have exercised no influence upon another girl, but destined to effect a fatal influence on Véronique's future life. On the day of a suppressed Church festival, a working day for the rest of the town, the Sauviats shut their shop and went first to mass and then for a walk. On their way into the country they passed by a bookseller's shop, and among the books displayed outside Véronique saw one called "Paul et Virginie." The fancy took her to buy it for the sake of the engraving; her father paid five francs for the fatal volume, and slipped it into the vast pocket of his overcoat.

"Wouldn't it be better to show it to M. le Vicaire?" asked the mother; for her any printed book was something of an abracadabra, which might or might not be for evil.

"Yes, I thought I would," Véronique answered simply.

She spent that night in reading the book, one of the most touching romances in the French language. The love scenes, half-biblical, and worthy of the early ages of the world, wrought havoc in Véronique's heart. A hand, whether diabolical or divine, had raised for her the veil which hitherto had covered nature. On the morrow the Little Virgin within the beautiful girl thought her flowers fairer than on the evening of the day before; she understood their symbolical language, she gazed up at the blue sky with exaltation, causeless tears rose to her eyes.

In every woman's life there comes a moment when she understands her destiny, or her organization, hitherto mute, speaks with authority. It is not always a man singled out by an involuntary and stolen glance who reveals the possession of a sixth sense, hitherto dormant; more frequently it is some sight that comes with the force of a surprise, a landscape, a page of a book, some day of high pomp, some ceremony of the Church; the scent of growing flowers, the delicate brightness of a misty morning, the intimate sweetness

of divine music—and something suddenly stirs in body or soul. For the lonely child, a prisoner in the dark house, brought up by parents almost as rough and simple as peasants; for the girl who had never heard an improper word, whose innocent mind had never received the slightest taint of evil; for the angelic pupil of Sister Martha and of the good curate of Saint-Etienne, the revelation of love came through a charming book from the hand of genius. No peril would have lurked in it for any other, but for her an obscene work would have been less dangerous. Corruption is relative. There are lofty and virginal natures which a single thought suffices to corrupt, a thought which works the more ruin because the necessity of combating it is not foreseen.

The next day Véronique showed her book to the good priest, who approved the purchase of a work so widely known for its childlike innocence and purity. But the heat of the tropics, the beauty of the land described in "Paul et Virginie," the almost childish innocence of a love scarcely of this earth, had wrought upon Véronique's imagination. She was captivated by the noble and sweet personality of the author, and carried away toward the cult of the Ideal, that fatal religion. She dreamed of a lover, a young man like Paul, and brooded over soft imaginings of that life of lovers in some fragrant island. Below Limoges, and almost opposite the Faubourg Saint-Martial, there is a little island in the Vienne; this, in her childish fancy, Véronique called the Isle of France, and filled with the fantastic creations of a young girl's dreams, vague shadows endowed with the dreamer's own perfections.

She sat more than ever in the window in those days, and watched the workmen as they came and went. Her parents' humble position forbade her to think of any one but an artisan; yet, accustomed as she doubtless was to the idea of becoming a working man's wife, she was conscious of an instinctive refinement which shrank from anything rough or coarse. So she began to weave for herself a romance such as most girls weave in their secret hearts for themselves

alone. With the enthusiasm which might be expected of a refined and girlish imagination, she seized on the attractive idea of ennobling one of these working men, of raising him to the level of her dreams. She made (who knows?) a Paul of some young man whose face she saw in the street, simply that she might attach her wild fancies to some human creature, as the overcharged atmosphere of a winter day deposits dew on the branches of a tree by the wayside, for the frost to transform into magical crystals. How should she escape a fall into the depths? for if she often seemed to return to earth from far-off heights with a reflected glory about her brows, yet oftener she appeared to bring with her flowers gathered on the brink of a torrent-stream which she had followed down into the abyss. On warm evenings she asked her old father to walk out with her, and never lost an opportunity of a stroll by the Vienne. She went into ecstasy at every step over the beauty of the sky and land, over the red glories of the sunset, or the joyous freshness of dewy mornings, and the sense of these things, the poetry of nature, passed into her soul.

She curled and waved the hair which she used to wear in simple plaits about her head; she thought more about her dress. The young, wild vine which had grown as its nature prompted about the old elm-tree was transplanted and trimmed and pruned, and grew upon a dainty green trellis.

One evening in December, 1822, when Sauviat (now seventy years old) had returned from a journey to Paris, the curate dropped in, and after a few commonplaces—"You must think of marrying your daughter, Sauviat," said the priest. "At your age you should no longer delay the fulfilment of an important duty."

"Why, has Véronique a mind to be married?" asked the amazed old man.

"As you please, father," the girl answered, lowering her eyes.

"We will marry her," cried portly Mother Sauviat, smiling as she spoke.

"Why didn't you say something about this before I left home, mother?" Sauviat asked. "I shall have to go back to Paris again."

In Jerome-Baptiste Sauviat's eyes, plenty of money appeared to be synonymous with happiness. He had always regarded love and marriage in their purely physical and practical aspects; marriage was a means of transmitting his property (he being no more) to another self; so he vowed that Véronique should marry a well-to-do man. Indeed, for a long while past this had become a fixed idea with him. His neighbor the hatter, who was retiring from business, and had an income of two thousand livres a year, had already asked for Véronique for his son and successor (for Véronique was spoken of in the quarter as a good girl of exemplary life), and had been politely refused. Sauviat had not so much as mentioned this to Véronique.

The curate was Véronique's director, and a great man in the Sauviats' eyes; so the day after he had spoken of Véronique's marriage as a necessity, old Sauviat shaved himself, put on his Sunday clothes, and went out. He said not a word to his wife and daughter, but the women knew that the old man had gone out to find a son-in-law. Sauviat went to M. Graslin.

Mr. Graslin, a rich banker of Limoges, had left his native Auvergne like Sauviat himself, without a sou in his pocket. He had begun life as a porter in a banker's service, and from that position had made his way, like many another capitalist, partly by thrift, partly by sheer luck. A cashier at five-and-twenty, and at five-and-thirty a partner in the firm of Perret & Grossetête, he at last bought out the original partners, and became sole owner of the bank. His two colleagues went to live in the country, leaving their capital in his hands at a low rate of interest. Pierre Graslin, at the age of forty-seven, was believed to possess six hundred thousand francs at the least. His reputation for riches had recently increased, and the whole department had applauded his free-handedness when he built a house for himself in the

new quarter of the Place des Arbres, which adds not a little to the appearance of Limoges. It was a handsome house, on the plan of alignment, with a façade like a neighboring public building; but though the mansion had been finished for six months, Pierre Graslin hesitated to furnish it. His house had cost him so dear that at the thought of living in it he drew back. Self-love, it may be, had enticed him to exceed the limits he had prudently observed all his life long; he thought, moreover, with the plain sense of a man of business, that it was only right that the inside of his house should be in keeping with the programme adopted with the façade. The plate and furniture and accessories needed for the housekeeping in such a mansion would cost more, according to his computations, than the actual outlay on the building. So, in spite of the town gossip, the broad grins of commercial circles, and the charitable surmises of his neighbors, Pierre Graslin stayed where he was on the damp and dirty ground-floor dwelling in the Rue Montantmanigne, where his fortune had been made, and the great house stood empty. People might talk, but Graslin was happy in the approbation of his two old sleeping partners, who praised him for displaying such uncommon strength of mind.

Such a fortune and such a life as Graslin's is sure to excite plentiful covetousness in a country town. During the past ten years more than one proposition of marriage had been skilfully insinuated. But the estate of a bachelor was eminently suited to a man who worked from morning to night, overwhelmed with business, and wearied by his daily round, a man as keen after money as a sportsman after game; so Graslin had fallen into none of the snares set for him by ambitious mothers who coveted a brilliant position for their daughters. Graslin, the Sauviat of a somewhat higher social sphere, did not spend two francs a day upon himself, and dressed no better than his second clerk. His whole staff consisted of a couple of clerks and an office-boy, though he went through an amount of business which might fairly be called immense, so multitudinous were its

ramifications. One of the clerks saw to the correspondence, the other kept the books; and for the rest Pierre Graslin was both the soul and body of his business. He chose his clerks from his family circle; they were of his own stamp, trustworthy, intelligent, and accustomed to work. As for the office-boy, he led the life of a dray horse.

Graslin rose all the year round before five in the morning, and was never in bed till eleven o'clock at night. His charwoman, an old Auvergnate, who came in to do the housework and to cook his meals, had strict orders never to exceed the sum of three francs for the total daily expense of the household. The brown earthenware, the strong coarse tablecloths and sheets, were in keeping with the manners and customs of an establishment in which the porter was the man of all work, and the clerks made their own beds. The blackened deal tables, the ragged straw-bottomed chairs with the holes through the centre, the pigeon-hole writing-desks and ramshackle bedsteads, in fact, all the furniture of the counting-house and the three rooms above it, would not have fetched three thousand francs, even if the safe had been included, a colossal solid iron structure built into the wall itself, before which the porter nightly slept with a couple of dogs at his feet. It had been a legacy from the old firm to the present one.

Graslin was not often seen in society, where a great deal was heard about him. He dined with the Receiver-General (a business connection) two or three times a year, and he had been known to take a meal at the prefecture; for, to his own intense disgust, he had been nominated a member of the general council of the department. "He wasted his time there," he said. Occasionally, when he had concluded a bargain with a business acquaintance, he was detained to lunch or dinner; and lastly, he was sometimes compelled to call upon his old patrons who spent the winter in Limoges. So slight was the hold which social relations had upon him that at twenty-five years of age Graslin had not so much as offered a glass of water to any creature.

People used to say, "That is M. Graslin!" when he passed along the street, which is to say, "There is a man who came to Limoges without a farthing, and has made an immense amount of money." The Auvergnat banker became a kind of pattern and example held up by fathers of families to their offspring—and an epigram which more than one wife cast in her husband's teeth. It is easy to imagine the motives which induced this principal pivot in the financial machinery of Limoges to repel the matrimonial advances so perseveringly made to him. The daughters of Messieurs Perret and Grossetête had been married before Graslin was in a position to ask for them; but as each of these ladies had daughters in the schoolroom, people left Graslin alone at last, taking it for granted that either old Perret or Grossetête the shrewd had arranged a match to be carried out some future day, when Graslin should be bridegroom to one of the granddaughters.

Sauviat had watched his fellow countryman's rise and progress more closely than any one. He had known Graslin ever since he came to Limoges, but their relative positions had changed so much (in appearance at any rate) that the friendship became an acquaintance, renewed only at long intervals. Still, in his quality of fellow countryman, Graslin was never above having a chat with Sauviat in the Auvergne dialect if the two happened to meet, and in their own language they dropped the formal "you" for the more familiar "thee" and "thou."

In 1823, when the youngest of the brothers Grossetête, the Receiver-General of Bourges, married his daughter to the youngest son of the Comte de Fontaine, Sauviat saw that the Grossetêtes had no mind to take Graslin into their family.

After a conference with the banker, old Sauviat returned in high glee to dine in his daughter's room.

"Véronique will be Madame Graslin," he told the two women.

"*Madame Graslin!*" cried Mother Sauviat, in amazement.

"Is it possible?" asked Véronique. She did not know Graslin by sight, but the name produced much such an effect on her imagination as the word Rothschild upon a Parisian shop-girl.

"Yes. It is settled," old Sauviat continued solemnly. "Graslin will furnish his house very grandly; he will have the finest carriage from Paris that money can buy for our daughter, and the best pair of horses in Limousin. He will buy an estate worth five hundred thousand francs for her, and settle the house on her besides. In short, Véronique will be the first lady in Limoges, and the richest in the department, and can do just as she likes with Graslin."

Véronique's boundless affection for her father and mother, her bringing-up, her religious training, her utter ignorance, prevented her from raising a single objection; it did not so much as occur to her that she had been disposed of without her own consent. The next day Sauviat set out for Paris, and was away for about a week.

Pierre Graslin, as you may imagine, was no great talker; he went straight to the point, and acted promptly. A thing determined upon was a thing done at once. So in February, 1822, a strange piece of news surprised Limoges like a sudden thunder-clap. Graslin's great house was being handsomely furnished. Heavy wagon loads from Paris arrived daily to be unpacked in the courtyard. Rumors flew about the town concerning the good taste displayed in the beautiful furniture, modern and antique. A magnificent service of plate came down from Odiot's by the mail; and (actually) three carriages!—a calèche, a brougham, and a cabriolet arrived carefully packed in straw as if they had been jewels.

"M. Graslin is going to be married!" The words passed from mouth to mouth, and in the course of a single evening the news filtered through the drawing-rooms of the Limousin aristocracy to the back parlors and shops in the suburbs, till all Limoges in fact had heard it. But whom was he going to marry? Nobody could answer the question. There was a mystery in Limoges.

As soon as Sauviat came back from Paris, Graslin made his first nocturnal visit, at half-past nine o'clock. Véronique knew that he was coming. She wore her blue silk gown, cut square at the throat, and a wide collar of cambric with a deep hem. Her hair she had simply parted into two bandeaux, waved and gathered, into a Grecian knot at the back of her head. She was sitting in a tapestry-covered chair near the fireside, where her mother occupied a great arm-chair with a carved back and crimson velvet cushions, a bit of salvage from some ruined chateau. A blazing fire burned on the hearth. Upon the mantel-shelf, on either side of an old clock (whose value the Sauviats certainly did not know), stood two old-fashioned sconces; six wax-candles in the sockets among the brazen vine-stems shed their light on the brown chamber, and on Véronique in her bloom. The old mother had put on her best dress.

In the midst of the silence that reigned in the streets at that silent hour, with the dimly lighted staircase as a background, Graslin appeared for the first time before Véronique —the shy childish girl whose head was still full of sweet fancies of love derived from Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's book. Graslin was short and thin. His thick black hair stood up straight on his forehead like bristles in a brush, in startling contrast with a face red as a drunkard's, and covered with suppurating or bleeding pustules. The eruption was neither scrofula nor leprosy, it was simply a result of an overheated condition of the blood; unflagging toil, anxiety, fanatical application to business, late hours, a life steady and sober to the point of abstemiousness, had induced a complaint which seemed to be related to both diseases. In spite of partners, clerks, and doctors, the banker had never brought himself to submit to a regimen which might have alleviated the symptoms or cured an evil, trifling at first, which was daily aggravated by neglect as time went on. He wished to be rid of it, and sometimes for a few days would take the baths and swallow the doses prescribed; but the round of business carried him away, and he forgot to take care of

himself. Now and again he would talk of going away for a short holiday, and trying the waters somewhere or other for a cure, but where is the man in hot pursuit of millions who has been known to stop? In this flushed countenance gleamed two gray eyes, the iris speckled with brown dots and streaked with fine green threads radiating from the pupil —two covetous eyes, piercing eyes that went to the depths of the heart, implacable eyes in which you read resolution and integrity and business faculty. A snub nose, thick blubber lips, a prominent rounded forehead, grinning cheekbones, coarse ears corroded by the sour humors of the blood—altogether Graslin looked like an antique satyr—a satyr tricked out in a greatcoat, a black satin waistcoat, and a white neckcloth knotted about his neck. The strong muscular shoulders, which had once carried heavy burdens, stooped somewhat already; the thin legs, which seemed to be imperfectly jointed with the short thighs, trembled beneath the weight of that over-developed torso. The bony fingers covered with hair were like claws, as is often the case with those who tell gold all day long. Two parallel lines furrowed the face from the cheekbones to the mouth—an unerring sign that here was a man whose whole soul was taken up with material interests; while the eyebrows sloped up toward the temples in a manner which indicated a habit of swift decision. Grim and hard though the mouth looked, there was something there that suggested an underlying kindliness, real good-heartedness, not called forth in a life of money-getting, and choked, it may be, by cares of this world, but which might revive at contact with a woman.

At sight of this apparition, something clutched cruelly at Véronique's heart. Everything grew dark before her eyes. She thought she cried out, but in reality she sat still, mute, staring with fixed eyes.

"Véronique," said old Sauviat, "this is M. Graslin."

Véronique rose to her feet and bowed, then she sank down into her chair again, and her eyes sought her mother. But La Sauviat was smiling at the millionnaire, looking so

happy, so very happy, that the poor child gathered courage to hide her violent feeling of repulsion and the shock she had received. In the midst of the conversation which followed, something was said about Graslin's health. The banker looked naively at himself in the bevelled mirror framed in ebony.

"I am not handsome, Mademoiselle," he said, and he explained that the redness of his face was due to his busy life, and told them how he had disobeyed his doctor's orders. He hoped that as soon as he had a woman to look after him and his household, a wife who would take more care of him than he took of himself, he should look quite a different man.

"As if anybody married a man for his looks, mate!" cried the dealer in old iron, slapping his fellow countryman on the thigh.

Graslin's explanation appealed to instinctive feelings which more or less fill every woman's heart. Véronique bethought herself of her own face, marred by a hideous disease, and in her Christian humility she thought better of her first impression. Just then some one whistled in the street outside, Graslin went down, followed by Sauviat, who felt uneasy. Both men soon returned. The porter had brought the first bouquet of flowers, which had been in readiness for the occasion. At the reappearance of the banker with this stack of exotic blossoms, which he offered to his future bride, Véronique's feelings were very different from those with which she had first seen Graslin himself. The room was filled with the sweet scent, for Véronique it was the realization of her day-dreams of the tropics. She had never seen white camellias before, had never known the scent of the Alpine cytisus, the exquisite fragrance of the citronella, the jessamine of the Azores, the verbena and musk-rose, and their sweetness, like a melody in perfume, falling on her senses stirred a vague tenderness in her heart.

Graslin left Véronique under the spell of that emotion;

but almost nightly after Sauviat returned home, the banker waited till all Limoges was asleep, and then slunk along under the walls to the house where the dealer in old iron lived. He used to tap softly on the shutters, the dog did not bark, the old man came down and opened the door to his fellow countryman, and Graslin would spend a couple of hours in the brown room where Véronique sat, and Mother Sauviat would serve him up an Auvergnat supper. The uncouth lover never came without a bouquet for Véronique, rare flowers only to be procured in M. Grossetête's hothouse, M. Grossetete being the only person in Limoges in the secret of the marriage. The porter went after dark to fetch the bouquet, which old Grossetete always gathered himself.

During those two months, Graslin went about fifty times to the house, and never without some handsome present, rings, a gold watch, a chain, a dressing-case, or the like; amazing lavishness on his part, which, however, is easily explained.

Véronique would bring him almost the whole of her father's fortune—she would have seven hundred and fifty thousand francs. The old man kept for himself an income of eight thousand francs, an old investment in the Funds, made when he was in imminent danger of losing his head on the scaffold. In those days he had put sixty thousand francs in assignats (the half of his fortune) into Government stock. It was Brézac who had advised the investment, and dissuaded him afterward when he thought of selling out; it was Brézac, too, who in the same emergency had been a faithful trustee for the rest of his fortune—the vast sum of seven hundred gold louis, with which Sauviat began to speculate as soon as he made good his escape from prison. In thirty years' time each of those gold louis had been transmuted into a bill for a thousand francs, thanks partly to the interest on the assignats, partly to the money which fell in at the time of Champagnac's death, partly to trading gains in the business, and to the money standing at compound

interest in Brézac's concern. Brézac had done honestly by Sauviat, as Auvergnat does by Auvergnat. And so whenever Sauviat went to take a look at the front of Graslin's great house—

"Veronique shall live in that palace!" he said to himself.

He knew that there was not another girl in Limousin who would have seven hundred and fifty thousand francs paid down on her marriage day, besides two hundred and fifty thousand of expectations. Graslin, the son-in-law of his choice, must therefore inevitably marry Véronique. So every evening Véronique received a bouquet, which daily made her little sitting-room bright with flowers, a bouquet carefully kept out of sight of the neighbors. She admired the beautiful jewels, the rubies, pearls, and diamonds, the bracelets, dear to all daughters of Eve, and thought herself less ugly thus adorned. She saw her mother happy over this marriage, and she herself had no standard of comparison; she had no idea what marriage meant, no conception of its duties; and finally, she heard the curate of Saint-Etienne praising Graslin to her, in his solemn voice, telling her that this was an honorable man with whom she would lead an honorable life. So Véronique consented to receive M. Graslin's attentions. In a lonely and monotonous life like hers, let a single person present himself day by day, and before long that person will not be indifferent; for either an aversion, confirmed by a deeper knowledge, will turn to hate, and the visitor's presence will be intolerable; or custom stales (so to speak) the sight of physical defects, and then the mind begins to look for compensations. Curiosity busies itself with the face; from some cause or other the features light up, there is some fleeting gleam of beauty there; and at last the nature, hidden beneath the outward form, is discovered. In short, first impressions once overcome, the force with which the one soul is attracted to the other is but so much the stronger, because the discovery of the true nature of the other is all its own. So love begins. Herein lies the secret of the passionate love which beautiful persons enter-

tain for others who are not beautiful in appearance; affection, looking deeper than the outward form, sees the form no longer, but a soul, and thenceforward knows nothing else. Moreover, the beauty so necessary in a woman takes in a man such a strange character that women's opinions differ as much on the subject of a man's good looks as men about the beauty of a woman.

After much meditation and many struggles with herself, Véronique allowed the banns to be published, and all Limoges rang with the incredible news. Nobody knew the secret—the bride's immense dowry. If that had been bruited abroad, Véronique might have chosen her husband, but perhaps even so would have been mistaken. It was a love-match on Graslin's side, people averred.

Upholsterers arrived from Paris to furnish the fine house. The banker was going to great expense over it, and nothing else was talked of in Limoges. People discussed the price of the chandeliers, the gilding of the drawing-room, the mythical subjects of the timepieces; and there were well-informed folk who could describe the flower-stands and the porcelain stoves, the luxurious novel contrivances. For instance, there was an aviary built above the ice-house in the garden of the Hotel Graslin; all Limoges marvelled at the rare birds in it—the paroquets, and Chinese pheasants, and strange water-fowl, there was no one who had not seen them.

M. and Mme. Grossetete, old people much looked up to in Limoges, called several times upon the Sauviats, Graslin accompanying them. Mme. Grossetete, worthy woman, congratulated Véronique on the fortunate marriage she was to make; so the Church, the family, and the world, together with every trifling circumstance, combined to bring this match about.

In the month of April, formal invitations were sent to all Graslin's circle of acquaintance. At eleven o'clock one fine sunny morning a calèche and a brougham, drawn by Limousin horses in English harness (old Grossetete had superintended his colleague's stable), arrived before the poor little

shop where the dealer in old iron lived; and the excited quarter beheld the bridegroom's sometime partners and his two clerks. There was a prodigious sensation, the street was filled by the crowd eager to see the Sauviats' daughter. The most celebrated hairdresser in Limoges had set the bride's crown on her beautiful hair and arranged her veil of priceless Brussels lace; but Véronique's dress was of simple white muslin. A sufficiently imposing assembly of the most distinguished women of Limoges was present at the wedding in the cathedral; the Bishop himself, knowing the piety of the Sauviats, condescended to perform the marriage ceremony. People thought the bride a plain-looking girl. For the first time she entered her hotel, and went from surprise to surprise. A state dinner preceded the ball, to which Graslin had invited almost all Limoges. The dinner given to the Bishop, the prefect, the president of the Court of First Instance, the public prosecutor, the mayor, the general, and to Graslin's sometime employers and their wives, was a triumph for the bride, who, like all simple and unaffected people, proved unexpectedly charming. None of the married people would dance, so that Véronique continued to do the honors of her house, and won the esteem and good graces of most of her new acquaintances; asking old Grossetete, who had taken a great kindness for her, for information about her guests, and so avoiding blunders. During the evening the two retired bankers spread the news of the fortune, immense for Limousin, which the parents of the bride had given her. At nine o'clock the dealer in old iron went home to bed, leaving his wife to preside at the ceremony of undressing the bride. It was said in the town that Mme. Graslin was plain but well shaped.

Old Sauviat sold his business and house in the town, and bought a cottage on the left bank of the Vienne, between Limoges and Le Cluzeau, and ten minutes' walk from the Faubourg Saint-Martial. Here he meant that he and his wife should end their days in peace. The two old people had rooms in Graslin's hotel, and dined there once or twice

a week with their daughter, whose walks usually took the direction of their house.

The retired dealer in old iron had nothing to do, and nearly died of leisure. Luckily for him, his son-in-law found him some occupation. In 1823 the banker found himself with a porcelain factory on his hands. He had loaned large sums to the manufacturers, which they were unable to repay, so he had taken over the business to recoup himself. In this concern he invested more capital, and by this means, and by his extensive business connections, made of it one of the largest factories in Limoges; so that when he sold it in three years after he took it over, he made a large profit on the transaction. He made his father-in-law the manager of this factory, situated in the very same quarter of Saint-Martial where his house stood; and in spite of Sauviat's seventy-two years, he had done not a little in bringing about the prosperity of a business in which he grew quite young again. The plan had its advantages likewise for Graslin; but for old Sauviat, who threw himself heart and soul into the porcelain factory, he would have been perhaps obliged to take a clerk into partnership and lose part of the profits, which he now received in full; but as it was, he could look after his own affairs in the town, and feel his mind at ease as to the capital invested in the porcelain works.

In 1827 Sauviat met with an accident, which ended in his death. He was busy with the stock-taking, when he stumbled over one of the crates in which the china was packed, grazing his leg slightly. He took no care of himself, and mortification set in; they talked of amputation, but he would not hear of losing his leg, and so he died. His widow made over about two hundred and fifty thousand francs, the amount of Sauviat's estate, to her daughter and son-in-law, Graslin undertaking to pay her two hundred francs a month, an amount amply sufficient for her needs. She persisted in living on without a servant in the little cottage; keeping her point with the obstinacy of old age, and in spite of her daughter's entreaties; but, on the other hand, she went almost every day

to the Hotel Graslin, and Véronique's walks, as heretofore, usually ended at her mother's house. There was a charming view from the windows of the river and the little island in the Vienne, which Véronique had loved in the old days, and called her Isle of France.

The story of the Sauviats has been anticipated partly to save interruption to the other story of the Graslins' household, partly because it serves to explain some of the reasons of the retired life which Véronique Graslin led. The old mother foresaw how much her child might one day be made to suffer through Graslin's avarice; for long she held out, and refused to give up the rest of her fortune, and only gave way when Véronique insisted upon it. Véronique was incapable of imagining circumstances in which a wife desires to have the control of her property, and acted upon a generous impulse; in this way she meant to thank Graslin for giving her back her liberty.

The unaccustomed splendors of Graslin's marriage had been totally at variance with his habits and nature. The great capitalist's ideas were very narrow. Véronique had had no opportunity of gauging the man with whom she must spend the rest of her life. During those fifty-five evening visits Graslin had shown but one side of his character—the man of business, the undaunted worker who planned and carried out large undertakings, the capitalist who looked at public affairs with a view to their probable effect on the bank rate and opportunities of money-making. And, under the influence of his father-in-law's million, Graslin had behaved generously in those days, though even then his lavish expenditure was made to gain his own ends; he was drawn into expense in the springtide days of his marriage partly by the possession of the great house, which he called his "Folly," the house still called the Hotel Graslin in Limoges.

As he had the horses, the calèche, and brougham, it was natural to make use of them to pay a round of visits on his marriage, and to go to the dinner-parties and dances given in honor of the bride by official dignitaries and wealthy

houses. Acting on the impulses which carried him out of his ordinary sphere, Graslin was "at home" to callers one day in the week, and sent to Paris for a cook. For about a year indeed he led the ordinary life of a man who has seventeen hundred thousand francs of his own, and can command a capital of three millions. He had come to be the most conspicuous personage in Limoges. During that year he generously allowed Mme. Graslin twenty-five twenty-franc pieces every month.

Véronique on her marriage had become a person of great interest to the rank and fashion of Limoges; she was a kind of godsend to the idle curiosity which finds such meagre sustenance in the provinces. Véronique, who had so suddenly made her appearance, was a phenomenon the more closely scrutinized on that account; but she always maintained the simple and unaffected attitude of an onlooker who watches manners and usages unknown to her, and seeks to conform to them. From the first she had been pronounced to have a good figure and a plain face, and now it was decided that she was good-natured, but stupid. She was learning so many things at once, she had so much to see and to hear, that her manner and talk gave some color to this accusation. A sort of torpor, moreover, had stolen over her which might well be mistaken for stupidity. Marriage, that "difficult profession" of wifehood, as she called it, in which the Church, the Code, and her own mother bade her practice the most complete resignation and perfect obedience, under pain of breaking all laws human and divine, and bringing about irreparable evils; marriage had plunged her into a bewilderment which grew to the pitch of vertigo and delirium. While she sat silent and reserved, she heard her own thoughts as plainly as the voices about her. For her "existence" had come to be extremely "difficult," to use the phrase of the dying Fontenelle, and ever more increasingly, till she grew frightened, she was afraid of herself. Nature recoiled from the orders of the soul; the body rebelled against the will. The poor snared creature wept on the

bosom of the great Mother of the sorrowful and afflicted; she betook herself to the Church, she redoubled her fervor, she confided to her director the temptations which assailed her, she poured out her soul in prayer. Never at any time in her life did she fulfil her religious duties so zealously. The tempest of despair which filled her when she knew that she did not love her husband, flung her at the foot of the altar, where divine comforting voices spoke to her of patience. And she was patient and sweet, living in hope of the joys of motherhood.

"Did you see Mme. Graslin this morning?" the women asked among themselves. "Marriage does not agree with her; she looked quite ghastly."

"Yes; but would you have given a daughter of yours to a man like M. Graslin? Of course, if you marry such a monster, you suffer for it."

As soon as Graslin was fairly married, all the mothers who had assiduously hunted him for the past ten years directed spiteful speeches at him. Véronique grew thin, and became plain in good earnest. Her eyes were heavy, her features coarsened, she looked shamefaced and embarrassed, and wore the dreary, chilling expression so repellent in bigoted devotees. A grayish tint overspread her complexion. She dragged herself languidly about during the first year of her marriage, usually the heyday of a woman's life. Before very long she sought for distraction in books, making use of her privilege as a married woman to read everything. She read Scott's novels, Byron's poems, the works of Schiller and Goethe, literature ancient and modern. She learned to ride, to dance, and draw. She made sepia drawings and sketches in water-color, eager to learn every device which women use to while away the tedium of solitary hours; in short, that second education which a woman nearly always undertakes for a man's sake and with his guidance, she undertook alone and for herself.

In the loftiness of a nature frank and free, brought up, as it were, in the desert, but fortified by religion, there was

a wild grandeur, cravings which found no satisfaction in the provincial society in which she moved. All the books described love; she looked up from her books on life, and found no traces of passion there. Love lay dormant in her heart like the germs which wait for the sun. Through a profound melancholy, caused by constant brooding over herself, she came by dim and winding ways back to the last bright dreams of her girlhood. She dwelt more than once on the old romantic imaginings, and became the heroine and the theatre of the drama. Once again she saw the island bathed in light, full of blossom and sweet scents, and all things grateful to her soul.

Not seldom her sad eyes wandered over her rooms with searching curiosity; the men she saw were all like Graslin; she watched them closely, and seemed to turn questioningly from them to their wives; but on the women's faces she saw no sign of her own secret trouble, and sadly and wearily she returned to her starting-point, uneasy about herself. Her highest thoughts met with a response in the books which she read of a morning, their wit pleased her; but in the evening she heard nothing but commonplace thoughts, which no one attempted to disguise by giving a witty turn to them; the talk around her was vapid and empty, or ran upon gossip and local news, which had no interest for her. She wondered sometimes at the warmth of discussions in which there was no question of sentiment, for her the very core of life. She was often seen gazing before her with fixed, wide eyes, thinking, doubtless, of hours which she had spent, while still a girl ignorant of life, in the room where everything had been in keeping with her fancies, and now laid in ruins, like Véronique's own existence. She shrank in pain from the thought of being drawn into the eddy of petty cares and interests like the other women among whom she was forced to live; her ill-concealed disdain of the littleness of her lot, visible upon her lips and brow, was taken for upstart insolence.

Mme. Graslin saw the coolness upon all faces, and felt a

certain bitter tone in the talk. She did not understand the reason, for as yet she had not made a friend sufficiently intimate to enlighten or counsel her. Injustice, under which small natures chafe, compels loftier souls to return within themselves, and induces in them a kind of humility. Véronique blamed herself, and tried to discover where the fault lay. She tried to be gracious, she was pronounced to be insincere; she redoubled her kindliness, and was said to be a hypocrite (her devotion giving color to the slander); she was lavish of hospitality, and gave dinners and dances, and was accused of pride. All Mme. Graslin's efforts were unsuccessful. She was misjudged and repulsed by the petty querulous pride of provincial coteries, where susceptibilities are always upon the watch for offences; she went no more into society, and lived in the strictest retirement. The love in her heart turned to the Church. The great spirit in its feeble house of flesh saw in the manifold behests of Catholicism but so many stones set by the brink of the precipices of life, raised there by charitable hands to prop human weakness by the way. So every least religious observance was practiced with the most punctilious care.

Upon this, the Liberal party added Mme. Graslin's name to the list of bigots in the town. She was classed among the Ultras, and party spirit strengthened the various grudges which Véronique had innocently stored up against herself, with its periodical exacerbations. But as she had nothing to lose by this ostracism, she went no more into society, and betook herself to her books, with the infinite resources which they opened to her. She thought over her reading, she compared methods, she increased the amount of her actual knowledge and her power of acquiring it, and by so doing opened the gateways of her mind to curiosity.

It was at this period of close and persistent study, while religion supported her, that she gained a friend in M. Grossetête, an old man whose real ability had not grown so rusty in the course of a life in a country town but that contact with a keen intelligence could still draw a few sparks from it.

The kind soul was deeply interested in Véronique, who, in return for the mild warmth of the mellowed affection which age alone can give, put forth all the treasures of her soul; for him the splendid powers cultivated in secret first blossomed forth.

A fragment of a letter written at this time to M. Grossetête will describe the mental condition of a woman who one day should give proof of a firm temper and lofty nature:

"The flowers which you sent to me for the dance were very lovely, yet they suggested painful thoughts. The sight of that beauty, gathered by you to decorate a festival, and to fade on my breast and in my hair, made me think of other flowers born to die unseen in your woods, to shed sweet scent that no one breathes. Then I asked myself why I was dancing, why I had decked myself with flowers, just as I ask God why I am here in the world. You see, my friend, that in everything there lurks a snare for the unhappy, just as the drollest trifles bring the sick back to their own sufferings. That is the worst of some troubles: they press upon us so constantly that they shape themselves into an idea which is ever present in our minds. An ever-present trouble ought surely to be a hallowed thought. You love flowers for their own sake; I love them as I love beautiful music. As I once told you, the secret of a host of things is hidden from me. . . . You, my old friend, for instance, have a passion for gardening. When you come back to town, teach me to share in this taste of yours; send me with a light footstep to my hothouse to feel the interest which you take in watching your plants grow. You seem to me to live and blossom with them, to take a delight in them, as in something of your own creation; to discover new colors, novel splendors, which come forth under your eyes, the result of your labors. I feel that the emptiness of my life is breaking my heart. For me, my hothouse is full of pining souls. The distress which I force myself to relieve saddens my very soul. I find some young mother without linen for her new-born babe, some old man

starving; I make their troubles mine, and even when I have helped them, the feelings aroused in me by the sight of misery relieved are not enough to satisfy my soul. Oh! my friend, I feel that I have great powers asserting themselves in me, powers of doing evil, it may be, which nothing can crush—powers that the hardest commandments of religion cannot humble. When I go to see my mother, when I am quite alone among the fields, I feel that I must cry aloud, and I cry. My body is the prison in which one of the evil genii has pent up some moaning creature, until the mysterious word shall be uttered which shatters the cramping cell. But this comparison is not just. In my case it should be reversed. It is the body which is a prisoner, if I may make use of the expression. Does not religion occupy my soul? And the treasures gained by reading are constant food for the mind. Why do I long for any change, even if it comes as suffering—for any break in the enervating peace of my lot? Unless I find some sentiment to uphold me, some strong interest to cultivate, I feel that I shall drift toward the abyss where every idea grows hazy and meaningless, where character is enervated, where the springs of one's being grow slack and inert, where I shall be no longer the woman Nature intended me to be. That is what my cries mean. . . . But you will not cease to send flowers to me because of this outcry of mine? Your friendship has been so sweet and pleasant a thing that it has reconciled me with myself for several months. Yes, I feel happy when I think that you sometimes throw a friendly glance over the blossoming desert-place, my inner self; that the wanderer, half dead after her flight on the fiery steed of a dream, will meet with a kind word of greeting from you on her return."

Three years after Véronique's marriage, it occurred to Graslin that his wife never used the horses, and, a good opportunity offering itself, he sold them. The carriages were sold at the same time, the coachman was dismissed, and the cook from Paris transferred to the Bishop's estab-

lishment. A woman servant took his place. Graslin ceased to give his wife an allowance, saying that he would pay all the bills. He was the happiest man in the world when he met with no opposition from the wife who had brought him a million. There was not much merit, it is true, in Mme. Graslin's self-denial. She knew nothing of money, she had been brought up in ignorance of it as an indispensable element in life. Graslin found the sums which he had given to her lying in a corner of her desk; scarcely any of it had been spent. Véronique gave to the poor, her trousseau had been so large that as yet she had had scarcely any expenses for dress. Graslin praised Véronique to all Limoges as the pattern of wives.

The splendor of the furniture gave him pangs, so he had it all shrouded in covers. His wife's bedroom, boudoir, and dressing-room alone escaped this dispensation, an economical measure which economized nothing, for the wear and tear to the furniture is the same, covers or no covers.

He next took up his abode on the ground floor, where the counting-house and office had been established, so he began his old life again, and was as keen in pursuit of gain as before. The Auvergnat banker thought himself a model husband because he breakfasted and dined with his wife, who carefully ordered the meals for him; but he was so extremely unpunctual, that he came in at the proper hour scarce ten times a month; and though, out of thoughtfulness, he asked her never to wait for him, Véronique always stayed to carve for him; she wanted to fulfil her wifely duties in some one visible manner. His marriage had not been a matter to which the banker gave much thought; his wife represented the sum of seven hundred and fifty thousand francs; he had not discovered that that wife shrank from him. Gradually he had left Mme. Graslin to herself, and became absorbed in business; and when he took it into his head to have a bed put for him in a room next to his private office, Véronique saw that his wishes were carried out at once.

So after three years of marriage this ill-assorted couple

went their separate ways as before, and felt glad to return to them. The capitalist, owner now of eighteen hundred thousand francs, returned to his occupation of money-making with all the more zest after the brief interval. His two clerks and the office-boy were somewhat better lodged and a little better fed—that was all the difference between the past and the present. His wife had a cook and a waiting-maid (the two servants could not well be dispensed with), and no calls were made on Graslin's purse except for strict necessaries.

And Véronique was happy in the turn things had taken; she saw in the banker's satisfaction a compensation for a separation for which she had never asked; it was impossible that Graslin should shrink from her as she shrank from him. She was half glad, half sorry of this secret divorce; she had looked forward to motherhood, which should bring a new interest into her life; but in spite of their mutual resignation, there was no child of the marriage as yet in 1828.

So Mme. Graslin, envied by all Limoges, led as lonely a life in her splendid home as formerly in her father's hovel; but the hopes and the childish joys of inexperience were gone. She lived in the ruins of her "castles in Spain," enlightened by sad experience, sustained by a devout faith, busying herself for the poor of the district, whom she loaded with kindnesses. She made baby-linen for them; she gave sheets and bedding to those who lay on straw; she went everywhere with her maid—a good Auvergnate whom her mother found for her. This girl attached herself body and soul to her mistress, and became a charitable spy for her, whose mission it was to find out trouble to soothe and distress to relieve. This life of busy benevolence and of punctilious performance of the duties enjoined by the Church was a hidden life, only known by the curés of the town who directed it, for Véronique took their counsel in all that she did, so that the money intended for the deserving poor should not be squandered by vice.

During these years Véronique found another friendship quite as precious to her and as warm as her friendship with old Grossetête. She became one of the flock of the Abbé Dutheil, one of the vicars-general of the diocese. This priest belonged to the small minority among the French clergy who lean toward concession, who would fain associate the Church with the popular cause. By putting evangelical principles in practice, the Church should gain her old ascendency over the people, whom she could then bind to the Monarchy. But the Abbé Dutheil's merits were unrecognized, and he was persecuted. Perhaps he had seen that it was hopeless to attempt to enlighten the Court of Rome and the clerical party; perhaps he had sacrificed his convictions at the bidding of his superiors; at any rate, he dwelt within the limits of the strictest orthodoxy, knowing the while that the mere expression of his convictions would close his way to a bishopric. A great and Christian humility, blended with a lofty character, distinguished this eminent churchman. He had neither pride nor ambition, and stayed at his post, doing his duty in the midst of peril. The Liberal party in the town, who knew nothing of his motives, quoted his opinions in support of their own, and reckoned him as "a patriot," a word which means "a revolutionary" for good Catholics. He was beloved by those below him, who did not dare to praise his worth; dreaded by his equals, who watched him narrowly; and a thorn in the side of his bishop. He was not exactly persecuted, his learning and virtues were too well known; it was impossible to find fault with him freely, though he criticised the blunders in policy by which the Throne and the Church alternately compromised each other, and pointed out the inevitable results; like poor Cassandra, he was reviled by his own party before and after the fall which he predicted. Nothing short of a Revolution was likely to shake the Abbé Dutheil from his place; he was a foundation stone in the Church, an unseen block of granite on which everything else rests. His utility was recognized, and—he was

left in his place, like most of the real power of which mediocrity is jealous and afraid. If, like the Abbé de Lamennais, he had taken up the pen, he would probably have shared his fate; at him, too, the thunderbolts of Rome would have been launched.

In person the Abbé Dutheil was commanding. Something in his appearance spoke of a soul so profound that the surface is always calm and smooth. His height and spare frame did not mar the general effect of the outlines of his figure, which vaguely recalled those forms which Spanish painters loved best to paint for great monastic thinkers and dreamers—forms which Thorvaldsen in our own time has selected for his Apostles. His face, with the long, almost austere lines in it, which bore out the impression made by the straight folds of his garments, possessed the same charm which the sculptors of the Middle Ages discovered and recorded in the mystic figures about the doorways of their churches. His grave thoughts, grave words, and grave tones were all in keeping, and the expression of the Abbé's personality. At the first sight of the dark eyes, which austerity had surrounded with hollow shadowy circles; the forehead, yellowed like old marble; the bony outlines of the head and hands; no one could have expected to hear any voice but his, or any teaching but that which fell from his lips. It was this purely physical grandeur, in keeping with the moral grandeur of his nature, that gave him a certain seeming haughtiness and aloofness, belied, it is true, by his humility and his talk, yet unprepossessing in the first instance. In a higher position these qualities would have been advantages which would have enabled him to gain a necessary ascendency over the crowd—an ascendency which it is quick to feel and to recognize; but he was a subordinate, and a man's superiors never pardon him for possessing the natural insignia of power, the majesty so highly valued in an older time, and often so signally lacking in modern upholders of authority.

His colleague, the Abbé de Grancour, the other vicar-

general of the diocese, a blue-eyed stout little man with a florid complexion, worked willingly enough with the Abbé Dutheil, albeit their opinions were diametrically opposed; a curious phenomenon, which only a wily courtier will regard as a natural thing, but, at the same time, the Abbé de Grancour was very careful not to commit himself in any way which might cost him the favor of his bishop; the little man would have sacrificed anything (even convictions) to stand well in that quarter. He had a sincere belief in his colleague, he recognized his ability; in private he admitted his doctrines, while he condemned them in public; for men of his kind are attracted to a powerful character, while they fear and hate the superiority whose society they cultivate. "He would put his arms round my neck while he condemned me," said the Abbé Dutheil. The Abbé de Grancour had neither friends nor enemies, and was like to die a vicar-general. He gave out that he was drawn to Véronique's house by a wish to give a woman so benevolent and so devout the benefit of his counsels, and the Bishop signified his approval; but, in reality, he was only too delighted to spend an evening now and then in this way with the Abbé Dutheil.

From this time forward both priests became pretty constant visitors in Véronique's house; they used to bring her a sort of general report of any distress in the district, and talk over the best means of benefiting the poor morally and materially; but year by year M. Graslin drew the purse-strings closer and closer; for, in spite of ingenious excuses devised by his wife and Aline the maid, he suspected that all the money was not required for expenses of dress and housekeeping. He grew angry at last when he reckoned up the amount which his wife gave away. He himself would go through the bills with the cook, he went minutely into the details of their expenditure, and showed himself the great administrator that he was by demonstrating conclusively from his own experience that it was possible to live in luxury on three thousand francs per annum. Whereupon he compounded the matter with his wife by allowing

her a hundred francs a month, to be duly accounted for, pluming himself on the royal bounty of the grant. The garden, now handed over to him, was "done up" of a Sunday by the porter, who had a liking for gardening. After the gardener was dismissed, the conservatory was turned to account as a warehouse, where Graslin deposited the goods left with him as security for small loans. The birds in the aviary above the ice-house were left to starve, to save the expense of feeding them; and when at length a winter passed without a single frost, he took that opportunity of declining to pay for ice any longer. By the year 1828 every article of luxury was curtailed, and parsimony reigned undisturbed in the Hotel Graslin.

During the first three years after Graslin's marriage, with his wife at hand to make him follow out the doctor's instructions, his complexion had somewhat improved; now it inflamed again, and became redder and more florid than in the past. So largely, at the same time, did his business increase that the porter was promoted to be a clerk (as his master had been before him), and another Auvergnat had to be found to do the odd jobs of the Hotel Graslin.

After four years of married life the woman who had so much wealth had not three francs to call her own. To the niggardliness of her parents succeeded the no less niggardly dispensation of her husband; and Mme. Graslin, whose benevolent impulses were checked, felt the need of money for the first time.

In the beginning of the year 1828 Véronique had recovered the bloom of health which had lent such beauty to the innocent girl who used to sit at the window in the old house in the Rue de la Cité. She had read widely since those days; she had learned to think and to express her thoughts; the habit of forming accurate judgments had lent profundity to her features. The little details of social life had become familiar to her, she wore a fashionable toilet with the most perfect ease and grace. If chance brought her into a drawing-room at this time, she found, not without surprise, that

she was received with something like respectful esteem; this way of regarding her, like her reception, was due to the two vicars-general and old Grossetête. The Bishop and one or two influential people, hearing of Véronique's unwearying benevolence, had talked about this fair life hidden from the world, this violet perfumed with virtues, this blossom of unfeigned piety. So, all unknown to Mme. Graslin, a revolution had been wrought in her favor; one of those reactions so much the more lasting and sure because they are slowly effected. With this right-about-face in opinion Véronique became a power in the land. Her drawing-room was the resort of the luminaries of Limoges; the practical change was brought about by this means.

The young Vicomte de Granville came to the town at the end of that year, preceded by the ready-made reputation which awaits a Parisian on his arrival in the provinces. He had been appointed deputy public prosecutor to the Court of Limoges. A few days after his arrival he said, in answer to a sufficiently silly question, that Mme. Graslin was the cleverest, most amiable, and most distinguished woman in the city, and this at the prefect's "At Home," and before a whole room full of people.

"And the most beautiful as well, perhaps?" suggested the Receiver-General's wife.

"There I do not venture to agree with you," he answered; "when you are present I am unable to decide. Mme. Graslin's beauty is not of a kind which should inspire jealousy in you, she never appears in broad daylight. Mme. Graslin is only beautiful for those whom she loves; you are beautiful for all eyes. If Mme. Graslin is deeply stirred, her face is transformed by its expression. It is like a landscape, dreary in winter, glorious in summer. Most people only see it in winter; but if you watch her while she talks with her friends on some literary or philosophical subject, or upon some religious question which interests her, her face lights up, and suddenly she becomes another woman, a woman of wonderful beauty."

This declaration, a recognition of the same beautiful transfiguration which Véronique's face underwent as she returned to her place from the communion table, made a sensation in Limoges, for the new substitute (destined, it was said, to be Attorney-General one day) was the hero of the hour. In every country town a man a little above the ordinary level becomes for a shorter or longer time the subject of a craze, a sham enthusiasm to which the idol of the moment falls a victim. To these freaks of the provincial drawing-room we owe the local genius and the person who suffers from the chronic complaint of unappreciated superiority. Sometimes it is native talent which women discover and bring into fashion, but more frequently it is some outsider; and for once, in the case of the Vicomte de Granville, the homage was paid to genuine ability.

The Parisian found that Mme. Graslin was the only woman with whom he could exchange ideas or carry on a sustained and varied conversation; and a few months after his arrival, as the charm of her talk and manner gained upon him, he suggested to some of the prominent men in the town, and to the Abbé Dutheil among them, that they might make their party at whist of an evening in Mme. Graslin's drawing-room. So Véronique was at home to her friends for five nights in the week (two days she wished to keep free, she said, for her own concerns); and when the cleverest men in the town gathered about Mme. Graslin, others were not sorry to take brevet rank as wits by spending their evenings in her society. Véronique received the two or three distinguished military men stationed in the town or on the garrison staff. The entire freedom of discussion enjoyed by her visitors, the absolute discretion required of them, tacitly and by the adoption of the manners of the best society, combined to make Véronique exclusive and very slow to admit those who courted the honor of her society to her circle. Other women saw not without jealousy that the cleverest and pleasantest men gathered round Mme. Graslin, and her power was the more widely felt in Limoges because she was exclusive. The

four or five women whom she accepted were strangers to the district, who had accompanied their husbands from Paris, and looked on provincial tittle-tattle with disgust. If some one chanced to call who did not belong to the inner *cénacle*, the conversation underwent an immediate change, and with one accord all present spoke of indifferent things.

So the Hotel Graslin became a sort of oasis in the desert where a chosen few sought relief in each other's society from the tedium of provincial life, a house where officials might discuss politics and speak their minds without fear of their opinions being reported, where all things worthy of mockery were fair game for wit and laughter, where every one laid aside his professional uniform to give his natural character free play.

In the beginning of that year 1828, Mme. Graslin, whose girlhood had been spent in the most complete obscurity, who had been pronounced to be plain and stupid and a complete nullity, was now looked upon as the most important person in the town, and the most conspicuous woman in society. No one called upon her in the morning, for her benevolence and her punctuality in the performance of her duties of religion were well known. She almost invariably went to the first mass, returning in time for her husband's early breakfast. He was the most unpunctual of men, but she always sat with him, for Graslin had learned to expect this little attention from his wife. As for Graslin, he never let slip an opportunity of praising her; he thought her perfection. She never asked him for money; he was free to pile up silver crown on silver crown, and to expand his field of operations. He had opened an account with the firm of Brézac; he had set sail upon a commercial sea, and the horizon was gradually widening out before him; his over-stimulated interest, intent upon the great events of the green table called Speculation, kept him perpetually in the cold frenzied intoxication of the gambler.

During this happy year, and indeed until the beginning of the year 1829, Mme. Graslin's friends watched a strange

change passing in her, under their eyes; her beauty became really extraordinary, but the reasons of the change were never discovered. Her eyes seemed to be bathed in a soft liquid light, full of tenderness, the blue iris widened like an expanding flower as the dark pupils contracted. Memories and happy thoughts seemed to light up her brow, which grew whiter, like some ridge of snow in the dawn, her features seemed to regain their purity of outline in some refining fire within. Her face lost the feverish brown color which threatens inflammation of the liver, the malady of vigorous temperaments of troubled minds and thwarted affections. Her temples grew adorably fresh and youthful. Frequently her friends saw glimpses of the divinely fair face which a Rafael might have painted, the face which disease had covered with an ugly film, such as time spreads over the canvas of the great master. Her hands looked whiter, there was a delicate fulness in the rounded curves of her shoulders, her quick dainty movements displayed to the full the lissome grace of her form.

The women said that she was in love with M. de Granville, who, for that matter, paid assiduous court to her, though Véronique raised between them the barriers of a pious resistance. The deputy public prosecutor professed a respectful admiration for her which did not impose upon frequenters of her house. Clear-sighted observers attributed to a different cause this change, which made Véronique still more charming to her friends. Any woman, however devout, could not but feel in her inmost soul that it was sweet to be so courted, to know the satisfaction of living in a congenial atmosphere, the delight of exchanging ideas (so great a relief in a tedious life), the pleasure of the society of well-read and agreeable men, and of sincere friendships, which grew day by day. It needed, perhaps, an observer still more profound, more acute, or more suspicious than any of those who came to the Hotel Graslin to divine the untamed greatness, the strength of the woman of the people pent up in the depths of Véronique's nature. Now and again they might

surprise her in a torpid mood, overcast by gloomy or merely pensive musings, but all her friends knew that she carried many troubles in her heart; that, doubtless, in the morning she had been initiated into many sorrows, that she penetrated into dark places where vice is appalling by reason of its unblushing front. Not seldom, indeed, the Vicomte, soon promoted to be an *avocat général*, scolded her for some piece of blind benevolence discovered by him in the course of his investigations. Justice complained that Charity had paved the way to the police court.

"Do you want money for some of your poor people?" old Grossetête had asked on this, as he took her hand in his. "I will share the guilt of your benefactions."

"It is impossible to make everybody rich," she answered, heaving a sigh.

An event occurred at the beginning of this year which was to change the whole current of Véronique's inner life, as well as the wonderful expression of her face, which hence forward became a portrait infinitely more interesting to a painter's eyes.

Graslin grew rather fidgety about his health, and to his wife's great despair left his ground-floor quarters and returned to her apartment to be tended. Soon afterward Mme. Graslin's condition became a matter of town gossip; she was about to become a mother. Her evident sadness, mingled with joy, filled her friends' thoughts; they then divined that, in spite of her virtues, she was happiest when she lived apart from her husband. Perhaps she had had hopes for better things since the day when the Vicomte de Granville had declined to marry the richest heiress in Limousin, and still continued to pay court to her. Ever since that event the profound politicians who exercise the censorship of sentiments, and settle other people's business in the intervals of whist, had suspected the lawyer and young Mme. Graslin of basing hopes of their own on the banker's failing health—hopes which were brought to nothing by this unexpected development. It was a time in Véronique's life when deep

distress of mind was added to the apprehensions of a first confinement, always more perilous, it is said, when a woman is past her first youth, but all through those days her friends showed themselves more thoughtful for her; there was not one of them but made her feel in innumerable small ways what warmth there was in these friendships of hers, and how solid they had become.

II

TASCHERON

IT WAS IN the same year that Limoges witnessed the terrible spectacle and strange tragedy of the Tascheron case, in which the young Vicomte de Granville displayed the talents which procured him the appointment of public prosecutor at a later day.

An old man living in a lonely house on the outskirts of the Faubourg Saint-Etienne was murdered. A large orchard isolates the dwelling on the side of the town, on the other there is a pleasure garden, with a row of unused hothouses at the bottom of it; then follow the open fields. The bank of the Vienne in this place rises up very steeply from the river, the little front garden slopes down to this embankment, and is bounded by a low wall surmounted by an open fence. Square stone posts are set along it at even distances, but the painted wooden railings are there more by way of ornament than as a protection to the property.

The old man, Pingret by name, a notorious miser, lived quite alone save for a servant, a country woman whom he employed in the garden. He trained his espaliers and pruned his fruit-trees himself, gathering his crops and selling them in the town, and excelled in growing early vegetables for the market. The old man's niece and sole heiress, who had married a M. des Vanneaulx, a man of small independent means, and lived in Limoges, had many a time implored her uncle to keep a man as a protection to the place, pointing out to

him that he would be able to grow more garden produce in several borders planted with standard fruit-trees beneath which he now sowed millet and the like; but it was of no use, the old man would not hear of it. This contradiction in a miser gave rise to all sorts of conjectures in the houses where the Vanneaulx spent their evenings. The most divergent opinions had more than once divided parties at boston. Some knowing folk came to the conclusion that there was a treasure hidden under the growing lucern.

"If I were in Mme. des Vanneaulx's place," remarked one pleasant gentleman, "I would not worry my uncle, I know. If somebody murders him, well and good; somebody will murder him. I should come in for the property."

Mme. des Vanneaulx, however, thought differently. As a manager at the Théatre-Italien implores the tenor who "draws" a full house to be very careful to wrap up his throat and gives him his cloak when the singer has forgotten his overcoat, so did Mme. des Vanneaulx try to watch over her relative. She had offered little Pingret a magnificent yard dog, but the old man sent the animal back again by Jeanne Malassis his servant.

"Your uncle has no mind to have one more mouth to feed up at our place," said the handmaid to Mme. des Vanneaulx.

The event proved that his niece's fears had been but too well founded. Pingret was murdered one dark night in the patch of lucern, whither he had gone, no doubt, to add a few louis to a pot full of gold. The servant, awakened by the sounds of the struggle, had the courage to go to the old man's assistance, and the murderer found himself compelled to kill her also, lest she should bear witness against him. This calculation of probable risks, which nearly always prompts a man guilty of one murder to add another to his account, is one unfortunate result of the capital sentence which he beholds looming in the distance.

The double crime was accompanied by strange circumstances, which told as strongly for the defence as for the prosecution. When the neighbors had seen nothing of Pin-

gret nor of the servant the whole morning; when, as they came and went, they looked through the wooden railings and saw that the doors and windows (contrary to wont) were still barred and fastened, the thing began to be bruited abroad through the Faubourg Saint-Etienne, till it reached Mme. des Vanneaulx, in the Rue des Cloches. Mme. des Vanneaulx, whose mind always ran on horrors, sent for the police, and the doors were broken open. In the four patches of lucern there were four gaping holes in the earth, surrounded by rubbish, and strewn with broken shards of the pots which had been full of gold the night before. In two of the holes, which had been partly filled up, they found the bodies of old Pingret and Jeanne Malassis, buried in their clothes; she, poor thing, had run out barefooted in her night-dress.

While the public prosecutor, the commissary, and the examining magistrate took down all these particulars, the unlucky des Vanneaulx collected the scraps of broken pottery, put them together, and calculated the amount the jars should have held. The authorities, perceiving the commonsense of this proceeding, estimated the stolen treasure at a thousand pieces per pot; but what was the value of those coins? Had they been forty or forty-eight franc pieces, twenty-four or twenty francs? Every creature in Limoges who had expectations felt for the des Vanneaulx in this trying situation. The sight of those fragments of crockery ware which once held gold gave a lively stimulus to Limousin imaginations. As for little Pingret, who often came to sell his vegetables in the market himself, who lived on bread and onions, and did not spend three hundred francs in a year, who never did anybody a good turn, nor any harm either, no one regretted him in the least—he had never done a pennyworth of good to the Faubourg Saint-Etienne. As for Jeanne Malassis, her heroism was considered to be ill-timed; the old man if he had lived would have grudged her reward; altogether, her admirers were few compared with the number of those who remarked, "I should have slept soundly in her place, I know!"

Then the curious and the next-of-kin were made aware of the inconsistencies of certain misers. The police, when they came to draw up the report, could find neither pen nor ink in the bare, cold, dismal, tumbledown house. The little old man's horror of expense was glaringly evident, in the great holes in the roof, which let in rain and snow as well as light; in the moss-covered cracks which rent the walls; in the rotting doors ready to drop from their hinges at the least shock, the unoiled paper which did duty as glass in the windows. There was not a window curtain in the house, not a looking-glass over the mantel-shelves; the grates were chiefly remarkable for the absence of fire-irons and the accumulation of damp soot, a sort of varnish over the handful of sticks or the log of wood which lay on the hearth. And as to the furniture—a few crippled chairs and maimed arm-chairs, two beds, hard and attenuated (Time had adorned old Pingret's bed-curtains with open-work embroidery of a bold design), one or two cracked pots and riveted plates, a worm-eaten bureau, where the old man used to keep his garden seeds, household linen thick with darn and patches —the furniture, in short, consisted of a mass of rags, which had only a sort of life kept in them by the spirit of their owner, and now that he was gone they dropped to pieces and crumbled to powder. At the first touch of the brutal hands of the police officers and infuriated next-of-kin they evaporated, Heaven knows how, and came to nameless ruin and an indefinable end. They were not. Before the terrors of a public auction they vanished away.

For a long time the greater part of the inhabitants of the capital of Limousin continued to take an interest in the hard case of the worthy des Vanneaulx, who had two children; but as soon as justice appeared to have discovered the perpetrator of the crime, this person absorbed all their attention, he became the hero of the day, and the des Vanneaulx were relegated to the obscurity of the background.

Toward the end of the month of March, Mme. Graslin had already felt the discomforts incidental to her condition,

which could no longer be concealed. By that time inquiries were being made into the crime committed in the Faubourg Saint-Etienne, but the murderer was still at large. Véronique received visitors in her bedroom, whither her friends came for their game of whist. A few days later Mme. Graslin kept her room altogether. More than once already she had been seized with the unaccountable fancies commonly attributed to women with child. Her mother came almost every day to see her; the two spent whole hours in each other's society.

It was nine o'clock. The card-tables were neglected, every one was talking about the murder and the des Vanneaulx, when the Vicomte de Granville came in.

"We have caught the man who murdered old Pingret!" he cried in high glee.

"And who is it?" The question came from all sides.

"One of the workmen in a porcelain factory, a man of exemplary conduct, and in a fair way to make his fortune. —He is one of your husband's old workmen," he added, turning to Mme. Graslin.

"Who is it?" Véronique asked faintly.

"Jean-François Tascheron."

"The unfortunate man!" she exclaimed. "Yes. I remember seeing him several times. My poor father recommended him to me as a valuable hand—"

"He left the place before Sauviat died," remarked old Mme. Sauviat; "he went over to the MM. Philippart to better himself.—But is my daughter well enough to hear about this?" she added, looking at Mme. Graslin, who was as white as the sheets.

After that evening old Mother Sauviat left her house, and in spite of her seventy years, installed herself as her daughter's nurse. She did not leave Véronique's room. No matter at what hour Mme. Graslin's friends called to see her, they found the old mother sitting heroically at her post by the bedside, busied with her eternal knitting, brood-

ing over her Véronique as in the days of the smallpox, answering for her child, and sometimes denying her to visitors. The love between the mother and daughter was so well known in Limoges that people took the old woman's ways as a matter of course.

A few days later, when the Vicomte de Granville began to give some of the details of the Tascheron case, in which the whole town took an eager interest, thinking to interest the invalid, La Sauviat cut him short by asking if he meant to give Mme. Graslin bad dreams again, but Véronique begged M. de Granville to go on, fixing her eyes on his face. So it fell out that Mme. Graslin's friends heard in her house the result of the preliminary examination, soon afterward made public, at first-hand from the *avocat général.* Here, in a condensed form, is the substance of the indictment which was being drawn up by the prosecution:

Jean-François Tascheron was the son of a small farmer burdened with a large family, who lived in the township of Montégnac. Twenty years before the perpetration of this crime, whose memory still lingers in Limousin, Canton Montégnac bore a notoriously bad character. It was a proverb in the Criminal Court of Limoges that fifty out of every hundred convictions came from the Montégnac district. Since 1816, two years after the arrival of the new curé, M. Bonnet, Montégnac lost its old reputation, and no longer sent up its contingent to the assizes. The change was generally set down to M. Bonnet's influence in the commune, which had once been a perfect hotbed of bad characters who gave trouble in all the country round about. Jean-François Tascheron's crime suddenly restored Montégnac to its former unenviable pre-eminence. It happened, singularly enough, that the Taschérons had been almost the only family in the countryside which had not departed from the old exemplary traditions and religious habits now fast dying out in country places. In them the curé had found a moral support and basis of operations, and naturally he

thought a great deal of them. The whole family were hard workers, remarkable for their honesty and the strong affection that bound them to each other; Jean-François Tascheron had had none but good examples set before him at home. A praiseworthy ambition had brought him to Limoges. He meant to make a little fortune honestly by a handicraft, and left the township, to the regret of his relations and friends, who were much attached to him.

His conduct during his two years of apprenticeship was admirable; apparently no irregularity in his life had foreshadowed the hideous crime for which he forfeited his life. The leisure which other workmen wasted in the wineshop and debauches, Tascheron spent in study.

Justice in the provinces has plenty of time on her hands, but the most minute investigation threw no light whatever on the secrets of this existence. The landlady of Jean-François's humble lodging, skilfully questioned, said that she had never had such a steady young man as a lodger. He was pleasant-spoken and good-tempered, almost gay, as you might say. About a year ago a change seemed to come over him. He would stop out all night several times a month, and often for several nights at a time. She did not know whereabout in the town he spent those nights. Still, she had sometimes thought, judging by the mud on his boots, that her lodger had been somewhere out in the country. He used to wear pumps, too, instead of hobnailed boots, although he was going out of the town, and before he went he used to shave and scent himself, and put on clean clothes.

The examining magistrate carried his investigations to such a length that inquiries were made in houses of ill fame and among licensed prostitutes, but no one knew anything of Jean-François Tascheron; other inquiries made among the class of factory operatives and shop-girls met with no better success; none of those whose conduct was light had any relations with the accused.

A crime without any motive whatever is inconceivable, especially when the criminal's bent was apparently toward

self-improvement, while his ambitions argued higher ideals and sense superior to that of other workmen. The whole criminal department, like the examining magistrate, were fain to find a motive for the murder in a passion for play on Tascheron's part; but after minute investigation, it was proved that the accused had never gambled in his life.

From the very first Jean-François took refuge in a system of denial which could not but break down in the face of circumstantial evidence when his case should come before a jury; but his manner of defending himself suggested the intervention of some person well acquainted with the law, or gifted with no ordinary intelligence. The evidence of his guilt, as in most similar cases, was at once unconvincing and yet too strong to be set aside. The principal points which told against Tascheron were four—his absence from home on the night of the murder (he would not say where he spent that night, and scorned to invent an *alibi*); a shred of his blouse, torn without his knowledge during the struggle with the poor servant-girl, and blown by the wind into the tree where it was found; the fact that he had been seen hanging about the house that evening by people in the suburb, who would not have remembered this but for the crime which followed; and lastly, a false key which he had made to fit the lock of the garden-gate, which was entered from the fields. It had been hidden rather ingeniously in one of the holes, some two feet below the surface. M. des Vanneaulx had come upon it while digging to see whether by chance there might be a second hoard beneath the first. The police succeeded in finding out the man who supplied the steel, the vise, and the key-file. This had been their first clew, it put them on Tascheron's track, and finally they arrested him on the limits of the department in a wood where he was waiting for the diligence. An hour later, and he would have been on his way to America. Moreover, in spite of the care with which the footprints had been erased in the trampled earth and on the muddy road, the rural policeman had found the marks of thin shoes, clear

and unmistakable, in the soil. Tascheron's lodgings were searched, and a pair of pumps were found which exactly corresponded with the impress, a fatal coincidence which confirmed the curious observations of his landlady.

Then the criminal investigation department saw another influence at work in the crime, and a second and perhaps a prime mover in the case. Tascheron must have had an accomplice, if only for the reason that it was impossible for one man to take away such a weight of coin. No man, however strong, could carry twenty-five thousand francs in gold very far. If each of the pots had held so much, he must have made four journeys. Now, a singular accident determined the very hour when the deed was done. Jeanne Malassis, springing out of bed in terror at her master's shrieks, had overturned the table on which her watch lay (the one present which the miser had made her in five years). The fall had broken the mainspring, and stopped the hands at two o'clock.

In mid-March, the time of the murder, the sun rises between five and six in the morning. So on the hypothesis traced out by the police and the department, it was clearly impossible that Tascheron should have carried off the money unaided and alone, even for a short distance, in the time. The evident pains which the man had taken to erase other footprints to the neglect of his own, also indicated an unknown assistant.

Justice, driven to invent some reason for the crime, decided on a frantic passion for some woman, and as she was not to be found among the lower classes, forensic sagacity looked higher.

Could it be some woman of the bourgeoisie who, feeling sure of the discretion of a lover of so puritanical a cut, had read with him the opening chapters of a romance which had ended in this ugly tragedy? There were circumstances in the case which almost bore out this theory. The old man had been killed by blows from a spade. The murder, it seemed, was the result of chance, a sudden fortuitous de-

velopment, and not a part of a deliberate plan. The two lovers might perhaps have concerted the theft, but not the second crime. Then Tascheron the lover and Pingret the miser had crossed each other's paths, and in the thick darkness of night two inexorable passions met on the same spot, both attracted thither by gold.

Justice devised a new plan for obtaining light on these dark data. Jean-François had a favorite sister; her they arrested and examined privately, hoping in this way to come by a knowledge of the mysteries of her brother's private life. Denise Tascheron denied all knowledge of his affairs; prudence dictating a system of negative answers which led her questioners to suspect that she really knew the reasons of the crime. Denise Tascheron, as a matter of fact, knew nothing whatever about it, but for the rest of her days she was to be under a cloud in consequence of her detention.

The accused showed a spirit very unusual in a working man. He was too clever for the cleverest "sheep of the prisons" with whom he came in contact—though he did not discover that he had to do with a spy. The keener intelligences among the magistracy saw in him a murderer through passion, not through necessity, like the common herd of criminals who pass by way of the petty sessions and the hulks to a capital charge. He was shrewdly plied with questions put with this idea; but the man's wonderful discretion left the magistrates much where they were before. The romantic but plausible theory of a passion for a woman of higher rank, once admitted, insidious questions were suddenly asked more than once; but Jean-François's discretion issued victorious from all the mental tortures which the ingenuity of an examining magistrate could inflict.

As a final expedient, Tascheron was told that the person for whom he had committed the crime had been discovered and arrested; but his face underwent no change, he contented himself with the ironical retort, "I should be very glad to see that person!"

When these details became known there were plenty of

people who shared the magistrate's suspicions, confirmed to all appearance by the behavior of the accused, who maintained the silence of a savage. An all-absorbing interest attached to a young man who had come to be a problem. Every one will understand how the public curiosity was stimulated by the facts of the case and how eagerly reports of the examination were followed; for, in spite of all the probings of the police, the case for the prosecution remained on the brink of a mystery, which the authorities did not dare to penetrate, beset with dangers as it was. In some cases a half-certainty is not enough for the magistracy. So it was hoped that the buried truth would arise and come to light at the great day of the Assizes, an occasion when criminals frequently lose their heads.

It happened that M. Graslin was on the jury impanelled for the occasion, and Véronique could not but hear through him or through M. de Granville the whole story of a trial which kept Limousin, and indeed all France, in excitement for a fortnight. The behavior of the prisoner at the bar justified the romances founded on the conjectures of justice which were current in the town; more than once his eyes were turned searchingly on the bevy of women privileged to enjoy the spectacle of a sensational drama in real life. Every time that the clear impenetrable gaze was turned on the fashionable audience, it produced a flutter of consternation, so greatly did every woman fear lest she might seem to inquisitive eyes in the Court to be the prisoner's partner in guilt.

The useless efforts of the criminal investigation department were then made public, and Limoges was informed of the precautions taken by the accused to insure the complete success of his crime.

Some months before that fatal night, Jean-François had procured a passport for North America. Clearly he had meant to leave France. Clearly, therefore, the woman in the case must be married; for there was, of course, no object to be gained by eloping with a young girl. Perhaps it

was a desire to maintain the fair unknown in luxury which had prompted the crime; but, on the other hand, a search through the registers of the administration had discovered that no passport for that country had been made out in a woman's name. The police had even investigated the registers in Paris as well as those of the neighboring prefectures, but fruitlessly.

As the case proceeded, every least detail brought to light revealed profound forethought on the part of a man of no ordinary intelligence. While the most virtuous ladies of Limousin explained the sufficiently inexplicable use of evening shoes for a country excursion on muddy roads and heavy soil, by the plea that it was necessary to spy upon old Pingret; the least coxcombically given of men were delighted to point out how eminently a pair of thin pumps favored noiseless movements about a house, scaling windows, and stealing along corridors.

Evidently Jean-François Tascheron and his mistress, a young, romantic and beautiful woman (for every one drew a superb portrait of the lady), had contemplated forgery, and the words "and wife" were to be filled in after his name on the passport.

Card-parties were broken up during these evenings by malicious conjectures and comments. People began to cast about for the names of women who went to Paris during March, 1829; or of others who might be supposed to have made preparations openly or secretly for flight. The trial supplied Limoges with a second Fualdès case, with an unknown Mme. Manson by way of improvement on the first. Never, indeed, was any country town so puzzled as Limoges after the Court rose each day. People's very dreams turned on the trial. Everything that transpired raised the accused in their eyes; his answers, skilfully turned over and over, expanded and edited, supplied a theme for endless argument. One of the jury asked, for instance, why Tascheron had taken a passport for America, to which the prisoner replied that he meant to open a porcelain factory there. In

this way he screened his accomplice without quitting his line of defence, and supplied conjecture with a plausible and sufficient motive for the crime in this ambition of his.

In the thick of these disputes, it was impossible that Véronique's friends should not also try to account for Tascheron's close reserve. One evening she seemed better than usual. The doctor had prescribed exercise; and that very morning Véronique, leaning on her mother's arm, had walked out as far as Mme. Sauviat's cottage, and rested there a while. When she came home again, she tried to sit up until her husband returned, but Graslin was late, and did not come back from the Court till eight o'clock; his wife waited on him at dinner after her custom, and in this way could not but hear the discussion between himself and his friends.

"We should have known more about this if my poor father were still alive," said Véronique, "or perhaps the man would not have committed the crime— But I notice that you have all of you taken one strange notion into your heads! You will have it that there is a woman at the bottom of this business (as far as that goes I myself am of your opinion), but why do you think that she is a married woman? Why cannot he have loved some girl whose father and mother refused to listen to him?"

"Sooner or later a young girl might have been legitimately his," returned M. de Granville. "Tascheron is not wanting in patience; he would have had time to make an independence honestly; he could have waited until the girl was old enough to marry without her parents' consent."

"I did not know that such a marriage was possible," said Mme. Graslin. "Then how is it that no one had the least suspicion of it, here in a place where everybody knows the affairs of everybody else, and sees all that goes on in his neighbor's house? Two people cannot fall in love without at any rate seeing each other or being seen of each other! What do you lawyers think?" she continued, looking the *avocat général* full in the eyes.

"We all think that the woman must be the wife of some tradesman, a man in business."

"I am of a totally opposite opinion," said Mme. Graslin. "That kind of woman has not sentiments sufficiently lofty," a retort which drew all eyes upon her. Every one waited for the explanation of the paradox.

"At night," she said, "when I do not sleep, or when I lie in bed in the daytime, I cannot help thinking over this mysterious business, and I believe I can guess Tascheron's motives. These are my reasons for thinking that it is a girl, and not a woman in the case. A married woman has other interests, if not other feelings; she has a divided heart in her, she cannot rise to the full height of the exaltation inspired by a love so passionate as this. She must never have borne a child if she is to conceive a love in which maternal instincts are blended with those which spring from desire. It is quite clear that some woman who wished to be a sustaining power to him has loved this man. That unknown woman must have brought to her love the genius which inspires artists and poets, ay, and women also, but in another form, for it is a woman's destiny to create, not things, but men. Our creations are our children, our children are our pictures, our books and statues. Are we not artists when we shape their lives from the first? So I am sure that if she is not a girl, she is not a mother; I would stake my head upon it. Lawyers should have a woman's instinct to apprehend the infinite subtle touches which continually escape them in so many cases.

"If I had been your substitute," she continued, turning to M. de Granville, "we should have discovered the guilty woman, always supposing that she is guilty. I think, with M. l'Abbé Dutheil, that the two lovers had planned to go to America, and to live there on poor Pingret's money, as they had none of their own. The theft, of course, led to the murder, the usual fatal consequence of the fear of detection and death. And it would be worthy of you," she added, with a suppliant glance at the young lawyer, "to withdraw

the charge of malice aforethought; you would save the miserable man's life. He is so great in spite of his crime that he would perhaps expiate his sins by some magnificent repentance. The works of repentance should be taken into account in the deliberations of justice. In these days are there no better ways of atoning an offence than by the loss of a head, or by founding, as in olden times, a Milan cathedral?"

"Madame, your ideas are sublime," returned the lawyer; "but if the averment of malice aforethought were withdrawn, Tascheron would still be tried for his life; and it is a case of aggravated theft, it was committed at night, the walls were scaled, the premises broken into—"

"Then, do you think he will be condemned?" she asked, lowering her eyelids.

"I do not doubt it. The prosecution has the best of it."

A light shudder ran through Mme. Graslin. Her dress rustled.

"I feel cold," she said.

She took her mother's arm, and went to bed.

"She is much better to-day," said her friends.

The next morning Véronique was at death's door. She smiled at her doctor's surprise at finding her in an almost dying state.

"Did I not tell you that the walk would do me no good?" she asked.

Ever since the opening of the trial there had been no trace of either swagger or hypocrisy in Tascheron's attitude. The doctor, always with a view to diverting his patient's mind, tried to explain this attitude out of which the counsel for the defence made capital for his client. The counsel's cleverness, the doctor opined, had dazzled the accused, who imagined that he should escape the capital sentence. Now and then an expression crossed his face which spoke plainly of hopes of some coming happiness greater than mere acquittal or reprieve. The whole previous life of this man of

twenty-three was such a flat contradiction to the deeds which brought it to a close that his champions put forward his behavior as a conclusive argument. In fact, the clews spun by the police into a stout hypothesis fit to hang a man, dwindled so pitiably when woven into the romance of the defence that the prisoner's counsel fought for his client's life with some prospect of success. To save him he shifted the ground of the combat, and fought the battle out on the question of malice aforethought. It was admitted, without prejudice, that the robbery had been planned beforehand, but contended that the double murder had been the result of an unexpected resistance in both cases. The issue looked doubtful; neither side had made good their case.

When the doctor went, the *avocat general* came in as usual to see Véronique before he went to the Court.

"I have read the counsel's speeches yesterday," she told him. "To-day the other side will reply. I am so very much interested in the prisoner that I should like him to be saved. Could you not forego a triumph for once in your life? Let the counsel for the defence gain the day. Come, make me a present of this life, and—perhaps—some day mine shall be yours— There is a doubt after that fine speech of Tascheron's counsel; well, then, why not—"

"Your voice is quivering—" said the Vicomte, almost taken by surprise.

"Do you know why?" she asked. "My husband has just pointed out a coincidence—hideous for a sensitive nature like mine—a thing that is like to cause me my death. You will give the order for his head to fall just about the time when my child will be born."

"Can I reform the Code?" asked the public prosecutor.

"There, go! You do not know how to love!" she answered, and closed her eyes.

She lay back on her pillow, and dismissed the lawyer with an imperative gesture.

M. Graslin pleaded hard, but in vain, for an acquittal, advancing an argument, first suggested to him by his wife,

and taken up by two of his friends on the jury: "If we spare the man's life, the des Vanneaulx will recover Pingret's money." This irresistible argument told upon the jury, and divided them—seven for acquittal as against five. As they failed to agree, the President and assessors were obliged to add their suffrages, and they were on the side of the minority. Jean-François Tascheron was found guilty of murder.

When sentence was passed, Tascheron burst into a blind fury, natural enough in a man full of strength and life, but seldom seen in Court when it is an innocent man who is condemned. It seemed to every one who saw it that the drama was not brought to an end by the sentence. So obstinate a struggle (as often happens in such cases) gave rise to two diametrically opposite opinions as to the guilt of the central figure in it. Some saw oppressed innocence in him, others a criminal justly punished. The Liberal party felt it incumbent upon them to believe in Tascheron's innocence; it was not so much conviction on their part as a desire to annoy those in office.

"What?" cried they. "Is a man to be condemned because his foot happens to suit the size of a footmark?—Because, forsooth, he was not at his lodgings at the time? (As if any young fellow would not die sooner than compromise a woman!)—Because he borrowed tools and bought steel?—(for it has not been proved that he made the key).—Because some one finds a blue rag in a tree, where old Pingret very likely put it himself to scare the sparrows, and it happens to match a slit made in the blouse?—Take a man's life on such grounds as these! And, after all, Jean-François has denied every charge, and the prosecution did not produce any witness who had seen him commit the crime."

Then they fell to corroborating, amplifying, and paraphrasing the speeches made by the prisoner's counsel and his line of defence. As for Pingret; what was Pingret? A money-box which had been broken open; so said the freethinkers.

A few so-called Progressives, who did not recognize the

sacred laws of property (which the Saint-Simonians had already attacked in the abstract region of Economical Theory), went further still.

"Old Pingret," said these, "was the prime author of the crime. The man was robbing his country by hoarding the gold. What a lot of businesses that idle capital might have fertilized! He had thwarted industry; he was properly punished."

As for the servant girl, they were sorry for her; and Denise, who had baffled the ingenuity of the lawyers, the girl who never opened her mouth at the trial without long pondering over what she meant to say, excited the keenest interest. She became a figure comparable, in another sense, with Jeanie Deans, whom she resembled in charm of character, modesty, in her religious nature and personal comeliness. So François Tascheron still continued to excite the curiosity not merely of Limoges, but of the whole department. Some romantic women openly expressed their admiration of him.

"If there is a love for some woman above him at the bottom of all this," said these ladies, "the man is certainly no ordinary man. You will see that he will die bravely!"

Would he confess? Would he keep silence? Bets were taken on the question. Since that outburst of rage with which he received his doom (an outburst which might have had a fatal ending for several persons in court but for the intervention of the police), the criminal threatened violence indiscriminately to all and sundry who came near him, and with the ferocity of a wild beast. The jailer was obliged to put him in a strait waistcoat; for if he was dangerous to others, he seemed quite as likely to attempt his own life. Tascheron's despair, thus restrained from all overt acts of violence, found a vent in convulsive struggles which frightened the warders, and in language which, in the Middle Ages, would have been set down to demoniacal possession.

He was so young that women were moved to pity that

a life so filled with an all-engrossing love should be cut off. Quite recently, and as if written for the occasion, Victor Hugo's sombre elegy and vain plea for the abolition of the death penalty (that support of the fabric of society) had appeared, and "Le Dernier jour d'un Condamné" was the order of the day in all conversations. Then finally, above the boards of the Assizes, set, as it were, upon a pedestal, rose the invisible mysterious figure of a woman, standing there with her feet dipped in blood; condemned to suffer heart-rending anguish, yet outwardly to live in unbroken household peace. At her every one pointed the finger—and yet, they almost admired that Limousin Medea with the inscrutable brow and the heart of steel in her white breast. Perhaps she dwelt in the home of this one or that, and was the sister, cousin, wife, or daughter of such a one. What a horror in their midst! It is in the domain of the Imagination, according to Napoleon, that the power of the Unknown is incalculably great.

As for the des Vanneaulx's hundred thousand francs, all the efforts of the police had not succeeded in recovering the money; and the criminal's continued silence was a strange defeat for the prosecution. M. de Granville (in the place of the public prosecutor then absent at the Chamber of Deputies) tried the commonplace stratagem of inducing the condemned man to believe that the penalty might be commuted if a full confession were made. But the lawyer had scarcely showed himself before the prisoner greeted him with furious yells, and epileptic contortions, and eyes ablaze with anger and regret that he could not kill his enemy. Justice could only hope that the Church might effect something at the last moment. Again and again the des Vanneaulx applied to the Abbé Pascal, the prison chaplain. The Abbé Pascal was not deficient in the peculiar quality which gains a priest a hearing from a prisoner. In the name of religion, he braved Tascheron's transports of rage, and strove to utter a few words amid the storms that convulsed that powerful nature. But the struggle between spiritual

paternity and the tempest of uncontrolled passions was too much for poor Abbé Pascal; he retired from it defeated and worn out.

"That is a man who has found his heaven here on earth," the old priest murmured softly to himself.

Then little Mme. des Vanneaulx thought of approaching the criminal herself, and took counsel of her friends. The Sieur des Vanneaulx talked of compromise. Being at his wits' end, he even betook himself to M. de Granville, and suggested that he (M. de Granville) should intercede with the King for his uncle's murderer if only, *if only*, the murderer would hand over those hundred thousand francs to the proper persons. The *avocat general* retorted that the King's Majesty would not stoop to haggle with criminals. Then the des Vanneaulx tried Tascheron's counsel, offering him twenty per cent on the total amount as an inducement to recover it for them. This lawyer was the one creature whom Tascheron could see without flying into a fury; him, therefore, the next-of-kin empowered to offer ten per cent to the murderer, to be paid over to the man's family. But in spite of the mutilations which these beavers were prepared to make in their heritage, in spite of the lawyer's eloquence, Tascheron continued obdurate. Then the des Vanneaulx, waxing wroth, anathematized the condemned man and called down curses upon his head.

"He is not only a murderer, he has no sense of decency!" cried they, in all seriousness, ignorant though they were of the famous "Plaint of Fualdès." The Abbé Pascal had totally failed, the application for a reversal of judgment seemed likely to succeed no better, the man would go to the guillotine, and then all would be lost.

"What good will our money be to him where he is going?" they wailed. "A murder you can understand, but to steal a thing that is of no use! The thing is inconceivable. What times we live in, to be sure, when people of quality take an interest in such a bandit! He does not deserve it."

"He has very little sense of honor," said Mme. des Vanneaulx.

"Still, suppose that giving up the money should compromise his sweetheart!" suggested an old maid.

"We would keep his secret," cried the Sieur des Vanneaulx.

"But then you would become accessories after the fact," objected a lawyer.

"Oh! the scamp!" This was the Sieur des Vanneaulx's conclusion of the whole matter.

The des Vanneaulx's debates were reported with some amusement to Mme. Graslin by one of her circle, a very clever woman, a dreamer and idealist, for whom everything must be faultless. The speaker regretted the condemned man's fury; she would have had him cold, calm, and dignified.

"Do you not see," said Véronique, "that he is thrusting temptation aside and baffling their efforts. He is deliberately acting like a wild beast."

"Besides," objected the Parisienne in exile, "he is not a gentleman, he is only a common man."

"If he had been a gentleman, it would have been all over with that unknown woman long ago," Mme. Graslin answered.

These events, twisted and tortured in drawing-rooms and family circles, made to bear endless constructions, picked to pieces by the most expert tongues in the town, all contributed to invest the criminal with a painful interest, when, two months later, the appeal for mercy was rejected by the Supreme Court. How would he bear himself in his last moments? He had boasted that he would make so desperate a fight for his life that it was impossible that he should lose it. Would he confess?—Would his conduct belie his language?—Which side would win their wagers?—Are you going to be there?—Are you not going?—How are we to go? As a matter of fact, the distance from the prison of Limoges to the place of execution is very short, sparing the

dreadful ordeal of a long transit to the prisoner, but also limiting the number of fashionable spectators. The prison is in the same building as the Palais de Justice, at the corner of the Rue du Palais and the Rue du Pont-Hérisson. The Rue du Palais is the direct continuation of the short Rue de Monte-à-Regret which leads to the Place d'Aîne or des Arênes, where executions take place (hence, of course, its name). The way, as has been said, is very short, consequently there are not many houses along it, and but few windows. What persons of fashion would care to mingle with the crowd in the square on such an occasion?

But the execution expected from day to day was day after day put off, to the great astonishment of the town, and for the following reasons. The pious resignation of the greatest scoundrels on their way to death is a triumph reserved for the Church, and a spectacle which seldom fails to impress the crowd. Setting the interests of Christianity totally aside (although this is a principle never lost sight of by the Church), the condemned man's repentance is too strong a testimony to the power of religion for the clergy not to feel that a failure on these conspicuous occasions is a heartbreaking misfortune. This feeling was aggravated in 1829, for party spirit ran high and poisoned everything, however small, which had any bearing on politics. The Liberals were in high glee at the prospect of a public collapse of the "priestly party," an epithet invented by Montlosier, a Royalist who went over to the Constitutionals and was carried by his new associates further than he intended. A party, in its corporate capacity, is guilty of disgraceful actions which in an individual would be infamous, and so it happens that when one man stands out conspicuous as the expression and incarnation of that party, in the eyes of the crowd he is apt to become a Robespierre, a Judge Jeffreys, a Laubardemont—a sort of altar of expiation to which others equally guilty attach ex votos in secret.

There was an understanding between the episcopal authorities and the police authorities, and still the execution

was put off, partly to secure a triumph for religion, but quite as much for another reason—by the aid of religion justice hoped to arrive at the truth. The power of the public prosecutor, however, had its limits; sooner or later the sentence must be carried out; and the very Liberals who insisted, for the sake of opposition, on Tascheron's innocence, and had tried to upset the case, now began to grumble at the delay. Opposition, when systematic, is apt to fall into inconsistencies; for the point in question is not to be in the right, but to have a stone always ready to sling at authority. So toward the beginning of August, the hand of authority was forced by the clamor (often a chance sound echoed by empty heads) called public opinion. The execution was announced.

In this extremity the Abbé Dutheil took it upon himself to suggest a last resource to the Bishop. One result of the success of this plan will be the introduction of another actor in the judicial drama, the extraordinary personage who forms a connecting-link between the different groups in it; the greatest of all the figures in this Scène; the guide who should hereafter bring Mme. Graslin on a stage where her virtues were to shine forth with the brightest lustre; where she would exhibit a great and noble charity, and act the part of a Christian and a ministering angel.

The Bishop's palace at Limoges stands on the hillside above the Vienne. The gardens, laid out in terraces supported by solidly built walls, crowned by balustrades, descend stepwise, following the fall of the land to the river. The sloping ridge rises high enough to give the spectator on the opposite bank the impression that the Faubourg Saint-Etienne nestles at the foot of the lowest terrace of the Bishop's garden. Thence, as you walk in one direction, you look out across the river, and in the other along its course through the broad fertile landscape. When the Vienne has flowed westward past the palace gardens, it takes a sudden turn toward Limoges, skirting the Faubourg Saint-Martial in a graceful curve. A little further,

and beyond the suburb, it passes a charming country house called the Cluzeau. You can catch a glimpse of the walls from the nearest point of the nearest terrace, a trick of the perspective uniting them with the church towers of the suburb. Opposite the Cluzeau lies the island in the river, with its indented shores, its thick growing poplars and forest-trees, the island which Véronique in her girlhood called the Isle of France. Eastward, the low hills shut in the horizon like the walls of an amphitheatre.

The charm of the situation and the rich simplicity of the architecture of the palace mark it out among the other buildings of a town not conspicuously happy in the choice or employment of its building materials. The view from the gardens, which attracts travellers in search of the picturesque, had long been familiar to the Abbé Dutheil. He had brought M. de Grancour with him this evening, and went down from terrace to terrace, taking no heed of the sunset shedding its crimson and orange and purple over the balustrades along the steps, the houses on the suburb, and the waters of the river. He was looking for the Bishop, who at that moment sat under the vines in a corner of the furthest terrace, taking his dessert, and enjoying the charms of the evening at his ease.

The long shadows cast by the poplars on the island fell like a bar across the river; the sunlight lighted up their topmost crests, yellowed somewhat already, and turned the leaves to gold. The glow of the sunset, differently reflected from the different masses of green, composed a glorious harmony of subdued and softened color. A faint evening breeze stirring in the depths of the valley ruffled the surface of the Vienne into a broad sheet of golden ripples that brought out in contrast all the sober hues of the roofs in the Faubourg Saint-Etienne. The church towers and house-tops of the Faubourg Saint-Martial were blended in the sunlight with the vine stems of the trellis. The faint hum of the country town, half hidden in the re-entering curve of the river, the softness of the air—all sights and sounds combined to steep

the prelate in the calm recommended for the digestion by the authors of every treatise on that topic. Unconsciously the Bishop fixed his eyes on the right bank of the river, on a spot where the lengthening shadows of the poplars in the island had reached the bank by the Faubourg Saint-Etienne, and darkened the walls of the garden close to the scene of the double murder of old Pingret and the servant; and just as his snug felicity of the moment was troubled by the difficulties which his vicars-general recalled to his recollection, the Bishop's expression grew inscrutable by reason of many thoughts. The two subordinates attributed his absence of mind to ennui; but, on the contrary, the Bishop had just discovered in the sands of the Vienne the key to the puzzle, the clew which the des Vanneaulx and the police were seeking in vain.

"My lord," began the Abbé de Grancour, as he came up to the Bishop, "everything has failed; we shall have the sorrow of seeing that unhappy Tascheron die in mortal sin. He will bellow the most awful blasphemies; he will heap insults on poor Abbé Pascal; he will spit on the crucifix, and deny everything, even hell-fire."

"He will frighten the people," said the Abbé Dutheil. "The very scandal and horror of it will cover our defeat and our inability to prevent it. So, as I was saying to M. de Grancour as we came, may this scene drive more than one sinner back to the bosom of the Church."

His words seemed to trouble the Bishop, who laid down the bunch of grapes which he was stripping on the table, wiped his fingers, and signed to his two vicars-general to be seated.

"The Abbe Pascal has managed badly," said he at last.

"He is quite ill after the last scene with the prisoner," said the Abbé de Grancour. "If he had been well enough to come, we should have brought him with us to explain the difficulties which put all the efforts which your lordship might command out of our power."

"The condemned man begins to sing obscene songs at the

top of his voice when he sees one of us; the noise drowns every word as soon as you try to make yourself heard," said a young priest who was sitting beside the Bishop.

The young speaker leaned his right elbow on the table, his white hand drooped carelessly over the bunches of grapes as he selected the reddest berries, with the air of being perfectly at home. He had a charming face, and seemed to be either a table-companion or a favorite with the Bishop, and was in fact a favorite and the prelate's table-companion. As the younger brother of the Baron de Rastignac he was connected with the Bishop of Limoges by the ties of family relationship and affection. Considerations of fortune had induced the young man to enter the Church; and the Bishop, aware of this, had taken his young relative as his private secretary until such time as advancement might befall him; for the Abbé Gabriel bore a name which predestined him to the highest dignities of the Church.

"Then have you been to see him, my son?" asked the Bishop.

"Yes, my lord. As soon as I appeared, the miserable man poured out a torrent of the most disgusting language against you and me; his behavior made it impossible for a priest to stay with him. Will you permit me to offer you a piece of advice, my lord?"

"Let us hear the wisdom which God sometimes puts into the mouth of babes," said the Bishop.

"Did he not cause Balaam's ass to speak?" the young Abbé de Rastignac retorted quickly.

"According to some commentators, the ass was not very well aware of what she was saying," the Bishop answered, laughing.

Both the vicars-general smiled. In the first place, it was the Bishop's joke; and in the second, it glanced lightly on this young Abbé, of whom all the dignitaries and ambitious churchmen grouped about the Bishop were envious.

"My advice would be to beg M. de Granville to put off the execution for a few days yet. If the condemned man

knew that he owed those days of grace to our intercession, he would perhaps make some show of listening to us, and if he listens—"

"He will persist in his conduct when he sees what comes of it," said the Bishop, interrupting his favorite.—"Gentlemen," he resumed after a moment's pause, "is the town acquainted with these details?"

"Where will you find the house where they are not discussed?" answered the Abbé de Grancour. "The condition of our good Abbé Pascal since his last interview is matter of common talk at this moment."

"When is Tascheron to be executed?" asked the Bishop.

"To-morrow. It is market day," replied M. de Grancour.

"Gentlemen, religion must not be vanquished," cried the Bishop. "The more attention is attracted to this affair, the more determined am I to secure a signal triumph. The Church is passing through a difficult crisis. Miracles are called for here among an industrial population, where sedition has spread itself and taken root far and wide; where religious and monarchical doctrines are regarded with a critical spirit; where nothing is respected by a system of analysis derived from Protestantism by the so-called Liberalism of to-day, which is free to take another name to-morrow. Go to M. de Granville, gentlemen, he is with us heart and soul; tell him that we ask for a few days' respite. I will go to see the unhappy man."

"You, my lord!" cried the Abbé de Rastignac. "Will not too much be compromised if *you* fail? You should only go when success is assured."

"If my Lord Bishop will permit me to give my opinion," said the Abbé Dutheil, "I think that I can suggest a means of securing the triumph of religion under these melancholy circumstances."

The Bishop's response was a somewhat cool sign of assent, which showed how low his vicar-general's credit stood with him.

"If any one has any ascendency over this rebellious soul,

and may bring it to God, it is M. Bonnet, the curé of the village where the man was born," the Abbé Dutheil went on.

"One of your protégés," remarked the Bishop.

"My lord, M. Bonnet is one of those who recommend themselves by their militant virtues and evangelical labors."

This answer, so modest and simple, was received with a silence which would have disconcerted any one but the Abbé Dutheil. He had alluded to merits which had been overlooked, and the three who heard him chose to regard the words as one of the meek sarcasms, neatly put, impossible to resent, in which churchmen excel, accustomed as they are by their training to say the thing they mean without transgressing the severe rules laid down for them in the least particular. But it was nothing of the kind; the Abbé never thought of himself. Then—

"I have heard of Saint Aristides for too long," the Bishop made answer, smiling. "If I were to leave his light under a bushel, it would be injustice or prejudice on my part. Your Liberals cry up your M. Bonnet as if he were one of themselves: I mean to see this rural apostle and judge for myself. Go to the public prosecutor, gentlemen, and ask him in my name for a respite; I will await his answer before despatching our well-beloved Abbé Gabriel to Montégnac to fetch the holy man for us. We will put his Beatitude in the way of working a miracle . . ."

The Abbé Dutheil flushed red at these words from the prelate-noble, but he chose to disregard any slight that they might contain for him. Both vicars-general silently took their leave, and left the Bishop alone with his young friend.

"The secrets of the confessional which we require lie buried there, no doubt," said the Bishop, pointing to the shadows of the poplars where they reached a lonely house half-way between the island and the Faubourg Saint-Etienne.

"So I have always thought," Gabriel answered. "I am not a judge, and I do not care to play the spy; but if I had been the examining magistrate, I should know the name of the woman who is trembling now at every sound, at every

word that is uttered, compelled all the while to wear a smooth, unclouded brow under pain of accompanying the condemned man to his death. Yet she has nothing to fear. I have seen the man—he will carry the secret of his passionate love to his grave."

"Crafty young man!" said the Bishop, pinching his secretary's ear, as he pointed out a spot between the island in the river and the Faubourg Saint-Etienne, lighted up by a last red ray from the sunset. The young priest's eyes had been fixed on it as he spoke. "Justice ought to have searched there; is it not so?"

"I went to see the criminal to try the effect of my guess upon him; but he is watched by spies; if I had spoken audibly I might have compromised the woman for whom he is dying."

"Let us keep silence," said the Bishop. "We are not concerned with man's justice. One head will fall, and that is enough. Besides, sooner or later, the secret will return to the Church."

The perspicacity of the priest, fostered by the habit of meditation, is far keener than the insight of the lawyer and the detective. After all the preliminary investigations, after the legal inquiry, and the trial at the Assizes, the Bishop and his secretary, looking down from the height of the terrace, had in truth, by dint of contemplation, succeeded in discovering details as yet unknown.

M. de Granville was playing his evening game of whist in Mme. Graslin's house, and his visitors were obliged to wait for his return. It was near midnight before his decision was known at the palace, and by two o'clock in the morning the Abbé Gabriel started out for Montégnac in the Bishop's own travelling carriage, lent to him for the occasion. The place is about nine leagues distant from Limoges; it lies under the mountains of the Corrèze, in that part of Limousin which borders on the department of the Creuse. All Limoges, when the Abbé left it, was in a ferment of excitement over the execution promised for this day, an expectation destined to be balked once more.

III

THE CURÉ OF MONTÉGNAC

IN PRIESTS and fanatics there is a certain tendency to insist upon the very utmost to which they are legally entitled where their interests are concerned. Is this a result of poverty? Is an egoism which favors the development of greed one of the consequences of isolation upon a man's character? Or are shrewd business habits, as well as parsimony, acquired by a course of management of charitable funds? Each temperament suggests a different explanation, but the fact remains the same whether it lurks (as not seldom happens) beneath urbane good humor, or (and equally often) is openly manifested; and the difficulty of putting the hand in the pocket is evidently increasingly felt on a journey.

Gabriel de Rastignac, the prettiest young gentleman who had bowed his head before the altar of the tabernacle for some time, only gave thirty sous to the postilions, and travelled slowly accordingly. The postilion tribe drive with all due respect a bishop who does but pay twice the amount demanded of ordinary mortals, but, at the same time, they are careful not to damage the episcopal equipage, for fear of getting themselves into trouble. The Abbé, travelling alone for the first time in his life, spoke mildly at each relay—"Just drive on a little faster, can't you?"

"You can't get the whip to work without a little palm oil," an old postilion replied, and the young Abbé, much mystified, fell back in a corner of the carriage. He amused himself by watching the landscape through which they were travelling, and walked up a hill now and again on the winding road from Bordeaux to Lyons.

Five leagues beyond Limoges the country changes. You

have left behind the charming low hills about the Vienne and the fair meadow slopes of Limousin, which sometimes (and this particularly about Saint-Léonard) put you in mind of Switzerland. You find yourself in a wilder and sterner district. Wide moors, vast steppes without grass or herds of horses, stretch away to the mountains of the Corrèze on the horizon. The far-off hills do not tower above the plain, a grandly rent wall of rock like the Alps in the south; you look in vain for the desolate peaks and glowing gorges of the Apennine, or for the majesty of the Pyrenees —the curving wavelike swell of the hills of the Corrèze bears witness to their origin, to the peaceful slow subsidence of the waters which once overwhelmed this country.

These undulations, characteristic of this, and, indeed, of most of the hill districts of France, have perhaps contributed quite as much as the climate to gain for the land its title of "the kindly," which Europe has confirmed. But it is a dreary transition country which separates Limousin from the provinces of Marche and Auvergne. In the mind of the poet and thinker who crosses it, it calls up visions of the Infinite (a terrible thought for certain souls); a woman looking out on its monotonous sameness is driven to muse; and to those who must dwell with the wilderness, nature shows herself stubborn, peevish, and barren; 'tis a churlish soil that covers these wide gray plains.

Only the neighborhood of a great capital can work such a miracle as transformed Brie during the last two centuries. Here there is no large settlement which sometimes puts life into the waste lands which the agricultural economist regards as blanks in creation, spots where civilization groans aghast, and the tourist finds no inns and a total absence of that picturesque in which he delights.

But to lofty spirits the moors, the shadows needed in the vast picture of nature, are not repellent. In our own day, Fenimore Cooper, owner of so melancholy a talent, has set forth the mysterious charm of great solitudes magnificently in "The Prairie." But the wastes shunned by every form

of plant life, the barren soil covered with loose stones and water-bone pebbles, the "bad lands" of the earth—are so many challenges to civilization. France must face her difficulties and find a solution for them, as the British are doing; their patient heroism is turning the most barren heather land in Scotland into productive farms. Left to their primitive desolation, these fallows produce a crop of discouragement, of idleness, of poor physique from insufficient food, and crime, whenever want grows too clamorous. In these few words, you have the past history of Montégnac.

What is there to be done when a waste on so vast a scale is neglected by the administration, deserted by the nobles, execrated by workers? Its inhabitants declare war against a social system which refuses to do its duty, and so it was in former times with the folk of Montégnac. They lived, like Highlanders, by murder and rapine. At sight of that country a thoughtful observer could readily imagine how that only twenty years ago the people of the village were at war with society at large.

The wide plateau, cut away on one side by the Vienne, on another by the lovely valleys of Marche, bounded by Auvergne to the east, and shut in by the mountains of the Corrèze on the south, is very much like (agriculture apart) the uplands of Beauce, which separate the basin of the Loire from the basin of the Seine, or the plateaus of Touraine or of Berri, or many others of these facets, as it were, on the surface of France, so numerous that they demand the careful attention of the greatest administrators.

It is an unheard-of thing that while people complain that the masses are discontented with their condition, and constantly aspiring toward social elevation, a government cannot find a remedy for this in a country like France, where statistics show that there are millions of acres of land lying idle, and in some cases (as in Berri) covered with leaf mould seven or eight feet thick! A good deal of this land which should support whole villages, and yield a magnificent return to cultivation, is the property of pig-headed communes which

refuse to sell to speculators because, forsooth, they wish to preserve the right of grazing some hundred cows upon it. Impotence is writ large over all these lands without a purpose. Yet every bit of land will grow some special thing, and neither arms nor will to work are lacking, but administrative ability and conscience.

Hitherto the upland districts of France have been sacrificed to the valleys. The Government has given its fostering protection to districts well able to take care of themselves. But most of these unlucky wastes have no water supply, the first requisite for cultivation. The mists which might fertilize the gray dead soil by depositing their oxides are swept across them by the wind. There are no trees to arrest the clouds and suck up their nourishing moisture. A few plantations here and there would be a godsend in such places. The poor folk who live in these wilds, at a practically impossible distance from the nearest large town, are without a market for their produce—if they have any. Scattered about on the edges of a forest left to nature, they pick up their firewood and eke out a precarious existence by poaching; in the winter starvation stares them in the face. They have not capital enough to grow wheat, for so poor are they that plows and cattle are beyond their means; and they live on chestnuts. If you have wandered through some Natural History Museum and felt the indescribable depression which comes on after a prolonged study of the unvarying brown hues of the European specimens, you will perhaps understand how the perpetual contemplation of the gray plains must affect the moral conditions of the people who live face to face with such disheartening sterility. There is no shadow, nor contrast, nor coolness; no sight to stir associations which gladden the mind. One could hail a stunted crab-tree there as a friend.

The highroad forked at length, and a crossroad branched off toward the village a few leagues distant. Montégnac lying (as its name indicates) at the foot of a ridge of hill is the chief village of a canton on the borders of Haute-Vienne.

The hillside above belongs to the township which encircles hill country and plain; indeed, the commune is a miniature Scotland, and has its Highlands and its Lowlands. Only a league away, at the back of the hill which shelters the township, rises the first peak of the chain of the Corrèze, and all the country between is filled by the great Forest of Montégnac, crowning the slope above the village, covering the little valleys and bleak undulating land (left bare in patches here and there), climbing the peak itself, stretching away to the north in a long narrow strip which ends abruptly in a point on a steep bank above the Aubusson road. That bit of steep bank rises above a deep hollow through which the highroad runs from Lyons to Bordeaux. Many a time coaches and foot-passengers have been stopped in the darkest part of the dangerous ravine; and the robberies nearly always went without punishment. The situation favored the highwaymen, who escaped by paths well known to them into their forest fastnesses. In such a country the investigations of justice find little trace. People accordingly shunned that route.

Without traffic neither commerce nor industry can exist; the exchange of intellectual and material wealth becomes impossible. The visible wonders of civilization are in all cases the result of the application of ideas as old as man. A thought in the mind of man—that is from age to age the starting-point and the goal of all our civilization. The history of Montégnac is a proof of this axiom of social science. When the administration found itself in a position to consider the pressing practical needs of the country, the strip of forest was felled, gendarmes were posted to accompany the diligence through the two stages; but, to the shame of the gendarmerie be it said, it was not the sword but a voice, not Corporal Chervin but Parson Bonnet, who won the battle of civilization by reforming the lives of the people. The curé, seized with pity and compassion for those poor souls, tried to regenerate them, and persevered till he gained his end.

After another hour's journey across the plains where flints succeeded to dust, and dust to flints, and flocks of partridges abode in peace, rising at the approach of the carriage with a heavy whirring sound of their wings, the Abbé Gabriel, like most other travellers who pass that way, hailed the sight of the roofs of the township with a certain pleasure. As you enter Montégnac you are confronted by one of the queer post-houses, not to be found out of France. The signboard, nailed up with four nails above a sorry empty stable, is a rough oaken plank on which a pretentious postilion has carved an inscription, darkening the letters with ink: *Pauste o chevos* it runs. The door is nearly always wide open. The threshold is a plank set up edgewise in the earth to keep the rain-water out of the stable, the floor being below the level of the road outside. Within, the traveller sees to his sorrow the harness, worn, mildewed, mended with string, ready to give way at the first tug. The horses are probably not to be seen; they are at work on the land, or out at grass, anywhere and everywhere but in the stable. If by any chance they are within, they are feeding. If the horses are ready, the postilion has gone to see his aunt or his cousin, or gone to sleep, or he is getting in his hay. Nobody knows where he is; you must wait while somebody goes to find him. He does not stir until he has a mind; and when he comes, it takes him an eternity to find his waistcoat or his whip, or to rub down his cattle. The buxom dame in the doorstep fidgets about even more restlessly than the traveller, and forestalls any outburst on his part by bestirring herself a good deal more quickly than the horses. She personates the postmistress whose husband is out in the fields.

It was in such a stable as this that the Bishop's favorite left his travelling carriage. The walls looked like maps; the thatched roof, as gay with flowers as a garden bed, bent under the weight of its growing houseleeks. He asked the woman of the place to have everything in readiness for his departure in an hour's time, and inquired his way to the

parsonage of her. The good woman pointed out a narrow alley between two houses. That was the way to the church, she said, and he would find the parsonage hard by.

While the Abbé climbed the steep path paved with cobblestones between the hedgerows on either side, the postmistress fell to questioning the postboy. Every postboy along the road from Limoges had passed on to his brother whip the surmises of the first postilion concerning the Bishop's intentions. So while Limoges was turning out of bed and talking of the execution of old Pingret's murderer, the country folk all along the road were spreading the news of the pardon procured by the Bishop for the innocent prisoner, and prattling of supposed miscarriages of justice, insomuch that when Jean-François came to the scaffold at a later day, he was like to be regarded as a martyr.

The Abbé Gabriel went some few paces along the footpath, red with autumn leaves, dark with blackberries and sloes; then he turned and stood, acting on the instinct which prompts us to make a survey of any strange place, an instinct which we share with the horse and dog. The reason of the choice of the site of Montégnac was apparent; several streams broke out of the hillside, and a small river flowed along by the departmental road which leads from the township to the prefecture. Like the rest of the villages in this plateau, Montégnac is built of blocks of clay, dried in the sun; if a fire broke out in a cottage, it is possible that it might find it earth and leave it brick. The roofs are of thatch; altogether, it was a poor-looking place that the Bishop's messenger saw. Below Montégnac lay fields of rye, potatoes, and turnips, land won from the plain. In the meadows on the lowest slope of the hillside, watered by artificial channels, were some of the celebrated breed of Limousin horses; a legacy (so it is said) of the Arab invaders of France, who crossed the Pyrenees to meet death from the battle-axes of Charles Martel's Franks, between Poitiers and Tours. Up above on the heights the soil looked parched. Now and again the reddish scorched surface, burned bare

by the sun, indicated the arid soil which the chestnuts love. The water, thriftily distributed along the irrigation channels, was only sufficient to keep the meadows fresh and green; on these hillsides grows the fine short grass, the delicate sweet pasture that builds you up a breed of horses delicate and impatient of control, fiery, but not possessed of much staying power; unexcelled in their native district, but apt to change their character when they change their country.

Some young mulberry trees indicated an intention of growing silk. Like most villages, Montégnac could only boast a single street, to wit, the road that ran through it; but there was an Upper and Lower Montégnac on either side of it, each cut in two by a little pathway running at right angles to the road. The hillside below a row of houses on the ridge was gay with terraced gardens which rose from a level of several feet above the road, necessitating flights of steps, sometimes of earth, sometimes paved with cobble-stones. A few old women, here and there, who sat spinning or looking after the children, put some human interest into the picture, and kept up a conversation between Upper and Lower Montégnac by talking to each other across the road, usually quiet enough. In this way news travelled pretty quickly from one end of the township to the other. The gardens were full of fruit-trees, cabbages, onions, and pot herbs; beehives stood in rows along the terraces.

A second parallel row of cottages lay below the road, their gardens sloping down toward the little river which flowed through fields of thick-growing hemp, the fruit-trees which love damp places marking its course. A few cottages, the post-house among them, nestled in a hollow, a situation well adapted for the weavers who lived in them, and almost every house was overshadowed by the walnut trees, which flourish best in heavy soil. At the further end of Montégnac, and on the same side of the road, stood a house larger and more carefully kept than the rest; it was the largest of a group equally neat in appearance, a little hamlet in fact separated from the township by its gardens,

and known then, as to-day, by the name of "Tascherons'." The commune was not much in itself, but some thirty outlying farms belonged to it. In the valley, several "water-lanes" like those in Berri and Marche marked out the course of the little streams with green fringes. The whole commune looked like a green ship in the midst of a wide sea.

Whenever a house, a farm, a village, or a district passes from a deplorable state to a more satisfactory condition of things, though as yet scarcely to be called strikingly prosperous, the life there seems so much a matter of course, so natural, that at first sight a spectator can never guess how much toil went to the founding of that not extraordinary prosperity; what an amount of effort, vast in proportion to the strength that undertook it; what heroic persistence lies there buried and out of sight, effort and persistence without which the visible changes could not have taken place. So the young Abbé saw nothing unusual in the pleasant view before his eyes; he little knew what that country had been before M. Bonnet came to it.

He turned and went a few paces further up the path, and soon came in sight of the church and parsonage, about six hundred feet above the gardens of Upper Montégnac. Both buildings, when first seen in the distance, were hard to distinguish among the ivy-covered stately ruins of the old Castle of Montégnac, a stronghold of the Navarreins in the twelfth century. The parsonage house had every appearance of being built in the first instance for a steward or head gamekeeper. It stood at the end of a broad terrace planted with lime-trees, and overlooked the whole country-side. The ravages of time bore witness to the antiquity of the flights of steps and the walls which supported the terrace, the stones had been forced out of place by the constant imperceptible thrusting of plant life in the crevices, until tall grasses and wild flowers had taken root among them. Every step was covered with a dark-green carpet of fine close moss. The masonry, solid though it was, was full of rifts and cracks, where wild plants of the pellitory and cam-

omile tribe were growing; the maidenhair fern sprang from the loopholes in thick masses of shaded green. The whole face of the wall, in fact, was hung with the finest and fairest tapestry, damasked with bracken fronds, purple snap-dragons with their golden stamens, blue borage, and brown fern and moss, till the stone itself was only seen by glimpses here and there through its moist, cool covering.

Up above, upon the terrace, the clipped box borders formed geometrical patterns in a pleasure garden framed by the parsonage house, and behind the parsonage rose the crags, a pale background of rock, on which a few drooping, feathery trees struggled to live. The ruins of the castle towered above the house and the church.

The parsonage itself, built of flints and mortar, boasted a single story and garrets above, apparently empty, to judge by the dilapidated windows in either gable under the high-pitched roof. A couple of rooms on the ground floor, separated by a passage with a wooden staircase at the further end of it, two more rooms on the second floor, and a little lean-to kitchen built against the side of the house in the yard, where a stable and coach-house stood perfectly empty, useless, abandoned—this was all. The kitchen garden lay between the house and the church; a ruinous covered passage led from the parsonage to the sacristy.

The young Abbé's eyes wandered over the place. He noted the four windows with their leaded panes, the brown moss-grown walls, the rough wooden door, so full of splits and cracks that it looked like a bundle of matches, and the adorable quaintness of it all by no means took his fancy. The grace of the plant life which covered the roofs, the wild climbing flowers that sprang from the rotting wooden sills and cracks in the wall, the trails and tendrils of the vines, covered with tiny clusters of grapes, which found their way in through the windows, as if they were fain to carry merriment and laughter into the house—all this he beheld, and thanked his stars that his way led to a bishopric, and not to a country parsonage.

The house, open all day long, seemed to belong to every one. The Abbé Gabriel walked into the dining-room, which opened into the kitchen. The furniture which met his eyes was poor—an old oak table with four twisted legs, an easy-chair covered with tapestry, a few wooden chairs, and an old chest, which did duty as a sideboard. There was no one in the kitchen except the cat, the sign of a woman in the house. The other room was the parlor; glancing round it, the young priest noticed that the easy-chairs were made of unpolished wood, and covered with tapestry. The panelling of the walls, like the rafters, was of chestnut wood, and black as ebony. There was a timepiece in a green case painted with flowers, a table covered with a worn green cloth, one or two chairs, and on the mantelshelf an Infant Jesus in wax under a glass shade set between two candlesticks. The hearth, surrounded by a rough wooden molding, was hidden by a paper screen representing the Good Shepherd with a sheep on his shoulder. In this way, doubtless, one of the family of the mayor, or of the justice of the peace, endeavored to express his acknowledgments of the care bestowed on his training.

The state of the house was something piteous. The walls, which had once been limewashed, were discolored here and there, and rubbed and darkened up to the height of a man's head. The wooden staircase, with its heavy balustrades, neatly kept though it was, looked as though it must totter if any one set foot on it. At the end of the passage, just opposite the front door, another door stood open, giving the Abbé Gabriel an opportunity of surveying the kitchen garden, shut in by the wall of the old rampart, built of the white crumbling stone of the district. Fruit-trees in full bearing had been trained espalier-fashion along this side of the garden, but the long trellises were falling to pieces, and the vine-leaves were covered with blight.

The Abbé went back through the house, and walked along the paths in the front garden. Down below the magnificent wide view of the valley was spread out before his

eyes, a sort of oasis on the edge of the great plain, which, in the light morning mists, looked something like a waveless sea. Behind, and rather to one side, the great forest stretched away to the horizon, the bronzed mass making a contrast with the plains, and on the other hand the church and the castle perched on the crag stood sharply out against the blue sky. As the Abbé Gabriel paced the tiny paths among the box-edged diamonds, circles, and stars, crunching the gravel beneath his boots, he looked from point to point at the scene; over the village, where already a few groups of gazers had formed to stare at him, at the valley in the morning light, the quick-set hedges that marked the ways, the little river flowing under its willows, in such contrast with the infinite of the plains. Gradually his impressions changed the current of his thoughts. He admired the quietness, he felt the influences of the pure air, of the peace inspired by a glimpse of a life of Biblical simplicity; and with these came a dim sense of the beauty of that life. He went back again to look at its details with a more serious curiosity.

A little girl, left in charge of the house no doubt, but busy pilfering in the garden, came back at the sound of a man's shoes creaking on the flagged pavement of the ground-floor rooms. In her confusion at being caught with fruit in her hand and between her teeth, she made no answer whatever to the questions put to her by this Abbé—young, handsome, daintily arrayed. The child had never believed it possible that such an Abbé could exist—radiant in fine lawn, neat as a new pin, and dressed in fine black cloth without a speck or a crease.

"M. Bonnet?" she echoed at last. "M. Bonnet is saying mass, and Mlle. Ursule is gone to the church."

The covered passage from the house to the sacristy had escaped the Abbé Gabriel's notice; so he went down the path again to enter the church by the principal door. The church porch was a sort of pent-house facing the village, set at the top of a flight of worn and disjointed steps, overlooking a square below; planted with the great elm-trees which

date from the time of the Protestant Sully, and full of channels washed by the rains.

The church itself, one of the poorest in France, where churches are sometimes very poor, was not unlike those huge barns which boast a roof above the door, supported by brick pillars or tree trunks. Like the parsonage house, it was built of rubble, the square tower being roofed with round tiles; but Nature had covered the bare walls with the richest tracery moldings, and made them fairer still with color and light and shade, carving her lines and disposing her masses, showing all the craftsman's cunning of a Michelangelo in her work. The ivy clambered over both sides, its sinewy stems clung to the walls till they were covered, beneath the green leaves, with as many veins as any anatomical diagram. Under this mantle, wrought by Time to hide the wounds which Time had made, damasked by autumn flowers that grew in the crevices, nestled the singing-birds. The rose window in the west front was bordered with blue harebells, like the first page of some richly painted missal. There were fewer flowers on the north side, which communicated with the parsonage, though even there there were patches of crimson moss on the gray stone, but the south wall and the apse were covered with many-colored blossoms; there were a few saplings rooted in the cracks, notably an almond-tree, the symbol of Hope. Two giant firs grew up close to the wall of the apse, and served as lightning-conductors. A low ruinous wall repaired and maintained at elbow height with fallen fragments of its own masonry ran round the churchyard. In the midst of the space stood an iron cross mounted on a stone pedestal, strewn with sprigs of box blessed at Easter, a reminder of a touching Christian rite, now fallen into disuse except in country places. Only in little villages and hamlets does the priest go at Eastertide to bear to his dead the tidings of the Resurrection—"You shall live again in happiness." Here and there above the grass-covered graves rose a rotten wooden cross.

The inside was in every way in keeping with the pictu-

resque neglect outside of the poor church, where all the ornament had been given by Time, grown charitable for once. Within, your eyes turned at once to the roof. It was lined with chestnut wood and sustained at equal distances by strong king-posts set on cross beams; age had imparted to it the richest tones which old woods can take in Europe. The four walls were lime-washed and bare of ornament. Poverty had made unconscious Iconoclasts of these worshippers.

Four pointed windows in the side walls let in the light through their leaded panes; the floor was of brick; the seats, wooden benches. The tomb-shaped altar bore for ornament a great crucifix, beneath which stood a tabernacle in walnut wood (its moldings brightly polished and clean), eight candlesticks (the candles thriftily made of painted wood), and a couple of china vases full of artificial flowers, things that a broker's man would have declined to look at, but which must serve for God. The lamp in the shrine was simply a floating-light, like a night-light, set in an old silver-plated holy-water stoup, hung from the ceiling by silken cords brought from the wreck of some chateau. The baptismal fonts were of wood like the pulpit, and a sort of cage where the churchwardens sat—the patricians of the place. The shrine in the Lady Chapel offered to the admiration of the public two colored lithographs framed in a narrow gilded frame. The altar had been painted white, and adorned with artificial flowers planted in gilded wooden flower-pots set out on a white altar-cloth edged with shabby yellowish lace.

But at the end of the church a long window covered with a red cotton curtain produced a magical effect. The lime-washed walls caught a faint rose tint from that glowing crimson; it was as if some thought Divine shone from the altar to fill the poor place with warmth and light. On one wall of the passage which led into the sacristy the patron saint of the village had been carved in wood and painted—a St. John the Baptist and his sheep, an execrable daub. Yet in spite of the bareness and poverty of the church, there was about

the whole a subdued harmony which appeals to those whose spirits have been finely touched, a harmony of visible and invisible emphasized by the coloring. The rich dark-brown tints of the wood made an admirable relief to the pure white of the walls, and both blended with the triumphant crimson of the chancel window, an austere trinity of color which recalled the great doctrine of the Catholic Church.

If surprise was the first feeling called forth by the sight of this miserable house of God, pity and admiration followed quickly upon it. Did it not express the poverty of those who worshipped there? Was it not in keeping with the quaint simplicity of the parsonage? And it was clean and carefully kept. You breathed, as it were, an atmosphere of the simple virtues of the fields; nothing within spoke of neglect. Primitive and homely though it was, it was clothed in prayer; a soul pervaded it which you felt, though you could not explain how.

The Abbé Gabriel slipped in softly, so as not to interrupt the meditations of two groups on the front benches before the high-altar, which was railed off from the nave by a balustrade of the inevitable chestnut wood, roughly made enough, and covered with a white cloth for the Communion. Just above the space hung the lamp. Some score of peasant folk on either side were so deeply absorbed in passionate prayer, that they paid no heed to the stranger as he walked up the church in the narrow gangway between the rows of benches. As the Abbé Gabriel stood beneath the lamp, he could see into the two chancels which completed the cross of the ground-plan; one of them led to the sacristy, the other to the churchyard. It was in this latter, near the graves, that a whole family clad in black were kneeling on the brick floor, for there were no benches in this part of the church. The Abbé bent before the altar on the step of the balustrade and knelt to pray, giving a side glance at this sight, which was soon explained. The Gospel was read; the curé took off his chasuble and came down from the altar toward the railing; and the Abbé, who had foreseen this, slipped away and

stood close to the wall before M. Bonnet could see him. The clock struck ten.

"My brethren," said the curé in a faltering voice, "even at this moment, a child of this parish is paying his forfeit to man's justice by submitting to its extreme penalty. We offer the holy sacrifice of the mass for the repose of his soul. Let us all pray together to God to beseech Him not to forsake that child in his last moments, to entreat that repentance here on earth may find in Heaven the mercy which has been refused to it here below. The ruin of this unhappy child, on whom we had counted most surely to set a good example, can only be attributed to a lapse from religious principles—"

The curé was interrupted by the sound of sobbing from the group of mourners in the transept; and by the paroxysm of grief the young priest knew that this was the Tascheron family, though he had never seen them before. The two foremost among them were old people of seventy years at least. Their faces, swarthy as a Florentine bronze, were covered with deep impassive lines. Both of them, in their old patched garments, stood like statues close against the wall; evidently this was the condemned man's grandfather and grandmother. Their red glassy eyes seemed to shed tears of blood; the old arms trembled so violently that the sticks on which they leaned made a faint sound of scratching on the bricks. Behind them the father and mother, their faces hidden in their handkerchiefs, burst into tears. About the four heads of the family knelt two married daughters with their husbands, then three sons, stupefied with grief. Five kneeling little ones, the eldest not more than seven years of age, understood nothing probably of all that went on, but looked and listened with the apparently torpid curiosity, which in the peasant is often a process of observation carried (so far as the outward and visible is concerned) to the highest possible pitch. Last of all came the poor girl Denise, who had been imprisoned by justice, the martyr to sisterly love; she was listening with an expression which seemed to betoken incredulity and straying thoughts. To her it

seemed impossible that her brother should die. Her face was a wonderful picture of another face, that of one among the three Maries who could not believe that Christ was dead, though she had shared the agony of His Passion. Pale and dry-eyed, as is the wont of those who have watched for many nights, her freshness had been withered more by sorrow than by work in the fields; but she still kept the beauty of a country girl, the full plump figure, the shapely red arms, a perfectly round face, and clear eyes, glittering at that moment with the light of despair in them. Her throat, firm-fleshed and white below the line of sunburned brown, indicated the rich tissue and fairness of the skin beneath the stuff. The two married daughters were weeping; their husbands, patient tillers of the soil, were grave and sad. None of the three sons in their sorrow raised their eyes from the ground.

Only Denise and her mother showed any sign of rebellion in the harrowing picture of resignation and despairing anguish. The sympathy and sincere and pious commiseration felt by the rest of the villagers for a family so much respected had lent the same expression to all faces, an expression which became a look of positive horror when they gathered from the curé's words that even in that moment the knife would fall. All of them had known the young man from the day of his birth, and doubtless all of them believed him to be incapable of committing the crime laid to his charge. The sobbing which broke in upon the simple and brief address grew so vehement that the curé's voice suddenly ceased, and he invited those present to fervent prayer.

There was nothing in this scene to surprise a priest, but Gabriel de Rastignac was too young not to feel deeply moved by it. He had not as yet put priestly virtues in practice; he knew that a different destiny lay before him; that it would never be his duty to go forth into the social breaches where the heart bleeds at the sight of suffering on every side; his lot would be cast among the upper ranks of the clergy which keep alive the spirit of sacrifice, represent the highest intel-

ligence of the Church, and, when occasion calls for it, display these same virtues of the village curé on the largest scale, like the great Bishops of Marseilles and Meaux, the Archbishops of Arles and Cambrai. The poor peasants were praying and weeping for one who (as they believed) was even then going to his death in a great public square, before a crowd of people assembled from all parts to see him die, the agony of death made intolerable for him by the weight of shame; there was something very touching in this feeble counterpoise of sympathy and prayer from a few, opposed to the cruel curiosity of the rabble and the curses, not undeserved. The poor church heightened the pathos of the contrast.

The Abbé Gabriel was tempted to go over to the Tascherons and cry, "Your son, your brother has been reprieved!" but he shrank from interrupting the mass; he knew, moreover, that it was only a reprieve, the execution was sure to take place sooner or later. But he could not follow the service; in spite of himself, he began to watch the pastor of whom the miracle of conversion was expected.

Out of the indications in the parsonage house, Gabriel de Rastignac had drawn a picture of M. Bonnet in his own mind: he would be short and stout, he thought, with a red powerful face, a rough working man, almost like one of the peasants themselves, and tanned by the sun. The reality was very far from this; the Abbé Gabriel found himself in the presence of an equal. M. Bonnet was short, slender, and weakly-looking; yet it was none of these characteristics, but an impassioned face, such a face as we imagine for an apostle, which struck you at a first glance. In shape it was almost triangular; starting from the temples on either side of a broad forehead, furrowed with wrinkles, the meagre outlines of the hollow cheeks met at a point in the chin. In that face, overcast by an ivory tint like the wax of an altar candle, blazed two blue eyes, full of the light of faith and the fires of a living hope. A long slender, straight nose divided it into two equal parts. The wide mouth spoke even when the full,

resolute lips were closed, and the voice which issued thence was one of those which go to the heart. The chestnut hair, thin, smooth, and fine, denoted a poor physique, poorly nourished. The whole strength of the man lay in his will. Such were his personal characteristics. In any other, such short hands might have indicated a bent toward material pleasures; perhaps he too, like Socrates, had found evil in his nature to subdue. His thinness was ungainly, his shoulders protruded too much, and he seemed to be knock-kneed; his bust was so over-developed in comparison with his limbs that it gave him something of the appearance of a hunchback without the actual deformity; altogether, to an ordinary observer, his appearance was not prepossessing. Only those who know the miracles of thought and faith and art can recognize and reverence the light that burns in a martyr's eyes, the pallor of steadfastness, the voice of love—all traits of the Curé Bonnet. Here was a man worthy of that early Church which no longer exists save in the pages of the "Martyrology" and in pictures of the sixteenth century; he bore unmistakably the seal of human greatness which most nearly approaches the Divine; conviction had set its mark on him, and a conviction brings a salient indefinable beauty into faces made of the commonest human clay; the devout worshipper at any shrine reflects something of its golden glow, even as the glory of a noble love shines like a sort of light from a woman's face. Conviction is human will come to its full strength; and being at once the cause and the effect, conviction impresses the most indifferent, it is a kind of mute eloquence which gains a hold upon the masses.

As the curé came down from the altar, his eyes fell on the Abbé Gabriel, whom he recognized; but when the Bishop's secretary appeared in the sacristy, he found no one there but Ursule. Her master had already given his orders. Ursule, a woman of canonical age, asked the Abbé de Rastignac to follow her along the passage through the garden.

"Monsieur le Curé told me to ask you whether you had breakfasted, sir," she said. "You must have started out

from Limoges very early this morning to be here by ten o'clock, so I will set about getting breakfast ready. Monsieur l'Abbé will not find the Bishop's table here, but we will do our best. M. Bonnet will not be long; he has gone to comfort those poor souls—the Taschcrons. Something very terrible is happening to-day to one of their sons."

"But where do the poor people live?" the Abbé Gabriel put in at length. "I must take M. Bonnet back to Limoges with me at once by the Bishop's orders. The unhappy man is not to be executed to-day; his lordship has obtained a reprieve—"

"Ah!" cried Ursule, her tongue itching to spread the news. "There will be plenty of time to take that comfort to the poor things while I am getting breakfast ready. The Taschcrons live at the other end of the village. You follow the path under the terrace, that will take you to the house."

As soon as the Abbé Gabriel was fairly out of sight, Ursule went down to take the tidings to the village herself, and to obtain the things needed for breakfast.

The curé had learned, for the first time, at the church, of a desperate resolve on the part of the Taschcrons, made since the appeal had been rejected. They would leave the district; they had already sold all they had, and that very morning the money was to be paid down. Formalities and unforeseen delays had retarded the sale; they had been forced to stay in the countryside after Jean-François was condemned, and every day had been for them a cup of bitterness to drink. The news of the plan, carried out so secretly, had only transpired on the eve of the day fixed for the execution. The Taschcrons had meant to leave the place before the fatal day; but the purchaser of their property was a stranger to the canton, a Corrézien to whom their motives were indifferent, and he on his own part had found some difficulty in getting the money together. So the family had endured the utmost of their misery. So strong was the feeling of their disgrace in these simple folk who had never tampered with conscience that grandfather and grandmother,

daughters and sons-in-law, father and mother, and all who bore the name of Tascheron, or were connected with them, were leaving the place. Every one in the commune was sorry that they should go, and the mayor had gone to the curé, entreating him to use his influence with the poor mourners.

As the law now stands, the father is no longer responsible for his son's crime, and the father's guilt does not attach to his children, a condition of things in keeping with other emancipations which have weakened the paternal power, and contributed to the triumph of that individualism which is eating the heart of society in our days. The thinker who looks to the future sees the extinction of the spirit of the family; those who drew up the new code have set in its place equality and independent opinion. The family will always be the basis of society; and now the family, as it used to be, exists no longer, it has come of necessity to be a temporary arrangement, continually broken up and reunited only to be separated again; the links between the future and the past are destroyed, the family of an older time has ceased to exist in France. Those who proceeded to the demolition of the old social edifice were logical when they decided that each member of the family should inherit equally, lessening the authority of the father, making of each child the head of a new household, suppressing great responsibilities; but is the social system thus re-edified as solid a structure, with its laws of yesterday unproved by long experience, as the old monarchy was in spite of its abuses? With the solidarity of the family, society has lost that elemental force which Montesquieu discovered and called "honor." Society has isolated its members the better to govern them, and has divided in order to weaken. The social system reigns over so many units, an aggregation of so many ciphers, piled up like grains of wheat in a heap. Can the general welfare take the place of the welfare of the family? Time holds the answer to this great enigma. And yet—the old order still exists, it is so deeply rooted that you find it most alive

among the people. It is still an active force in remote districts where "prejudice," as it is called, likewise exists; in old-world nooks where all the members of a family suffer for the crime of one, and the children for the sins of their fathers.

It was this belief which made their own countryside intolerable to the Taschercns. Their profoundly religious natures had brought them to the church that morning, for how was it possible to stay away when the mass was said for their son, and prayer offered that God might bring him to a repentance which should reopen eternal life to him? and, moreover, must they not take leave of the village altar? But, for all that, their plans were made; and when the curé, who followed them, entered the principal house, he found the bundles made up, ready for the journey. The purchaser was waiting with the money. The notary had just made out the receipt. Out in the yard, in front of the house, stood a country cart ready to take the old people and the money and Jean-François's mother. The rest of the family meant to set out on foot that night.

The young Abbé entered the room on the ground floor where the whole family were assembled, just as the curé of Montégnac had exhausted all his eloquence. The two old people seemed to have ceased to feel from excess of grief; they were crouching on their bundles in a corner of the room, gazing round them at the old house, which had been a family possession from father to son, at the familiar furniture, at the man who had bought it all, and then at each other, as who should say, "Who would have thought that we should ever have come to this?" For a long time past the old people had resigned their authority to their son, the prisoner's father; and now, like old kings after their abdication, they played the passive part of subjects and children. Tascheron stood upright listening to the curé, to whom he gave answers in a deep voice by monosyllables. He was a man of forty-eight or thereabout, with a fine face, such as served Titian for his Apostles. It was a trustworthy face, gravely honest

and thoughtful; a severe profile, a nose at right angles with the brows, blue eyes, a noble forehead, regular features, dark crisped stubborn hair, growing in the symmetrical fashion which adds a charm to a visage bronzed by a life of work in the open air—this was the present head of the house. It was easy to see that the curé's arguments were shattered against that resolute will.

Denise was leaning against the bread hutch, watching the notary, who used it as a writing-table; they had given him the grandmother's armchair. The man who had bought the place sat beside the scrivener. The two married sisters were laying the cloth for the last meal which the old folk would offer or partake of in the old house and in their own country before they set out to live beneath alien skies. The men of the family half stood, half sat, propped against the large bedstead with the green serge curtains, while Tascheron's wife, their mother, was whisking an omelet by the fire. The grandchildren crowded about the doorway, and the purchaser's family were outside.

Out of the window you could see the garden, carefully cultivated, stocked with fruit-trees; the two old people had planted them—every one. Everything about them, like the old smoke-begrimed room with its black rafters, seemed to share in the pent-up sorrow, which could be read in so many different expressions on the different faces. The meal was being prepared for the notary, the purchaser, the children, and the men; neither the father, nor mother, nor Denise, nor her sisters, cared to satisfy their hunger, their hearts were too heavily oppressed. There was a lofty and heart-rending resignation in this last performance of the duties of country hospitality—the Taschérons, men of an ancient stock, ended as people usually begin, by doing the honors of their house.

The Bishop's secretary was impressed by the scene, so simple and natural, yet so solemn, which met his eyes as he came to summon the curé of Montégnac to do the Bishop's bidding.

"The good man's son is still alive," Gabriel said, addressing the curé.

At the words, which every one heard in the prevailing silence, the two old people sprang to their feet as if the Trumpet had sounded for the Last Judgment. The mother dropped her frying-pan into the fire. A cry of joy broke from Denise. All the others seemed to be turned to stone in their dull amazement.

"*Jean-François is pardoned!*" The cry came at that moment as from one voice from the whole village, who rushed up to the Tascherons' house. "It is his lordship the Bishop—"

"I was *sure* of his innocence!" exclaimed the mother.

"The purchase holds good all the same, doesn't it?" asked the buyer, and the notary answered him by a nod.

In a moment the Abbé Gabriel became the point of interest, all eyes were fixed on him; his face was so sad that it was suspected that there was some mistake, but he could not bear to correct it, and went out with the curé. Outside the house he dismissed the crowd by telling those who came round about him that there was no pardon, it was only a reprieve, and a dismayed silence at once succeeded to the clamor. Gabriel and the curé turned into the house again, and saw a look of anguish on all the faces—the sudden silence in the village had been understood.

"Jean-François has not received his pardon, my friends," said the young Abbe, seeing that the blow had been struck, "but my lord Bishop's anxiety for his soul is so great that he has put off the execution that your son may not perish to all eternity at least."

"Then is he living?" cried Denise.

The Abbé took the curé aside and told him of his parishioner's impiety, of the consequent peril to religion, and what it was that the Bishop expected of the curé of Montégnac.

"My lord Bishop requires my death," returned the curé. "Already I have refused to go to this unhappy boy when his afflicted family asked me. The meeting and the scene *there*

afterward would shatter me like a glass. Let every man do his work. The weakness of my system, or rather the oversensitiveness of my nervous organization, makes it out of the question for me to fulfil these duties of our ministry. I am still a country parson that I may serve my like, in a sphere where nothing more is demanded of me in a Christian life than I can accomplish. I thought very carefully over this matter, and tried to satisfy these good Tascherons, and to do my duty toward this poor boy of theirs; but at the bare thought of mounting the cart with him, the mere idea of being present while the preparations for death were being made, a deadly chill runs through my veins. No one would ask it of a mother; and remember, sir, that he is a child of my poor church—"

"Then you refuse to obey the Bishop's summons?" asked the Abbé Gabriel.

M. Bonnet looked at him.

"His lordship does not know the state of my health," he said, "nor does he know that my nature rises in revolt against—"

"There are times when, like Belzunce at Marseilles, we are bound to face a certain death," the Abbé Gabriel broke in.

Just at that moment the curé felt that a hand pulled his cassock; he heard sobs, and, turning, saw the whole family on their knees. Old and young, parents and children, men and women, held out their hands to him imploringly; all the voices united in one cry as he showed his flushed face.

"Ah! save his soul at least!"

It was the old grandmother who had caught at the skirt of his cassock, and was bathing it with tears.

"I will obey, sir—" No sooner were the words uttered than the curé was forced to sit down; his knees trembled under him. The young secretary explained the nature of Jean-François's frenzy.

"Do you think that the sight of his younger sister might shake him?" he added, as he came to an end.

"Yes, certainly," returned the curé.—"Denise, you will go with us."

"So shall I," said the mother.

"No!" shouted the father. "That boy is dead to us. You know that. Not one of us shall see him."

"Do not stand in the way of his salvation," said the young Abbé. "If you refuse us the means of softening him, you take the responsibility of his soul upon yourself. In his present state his death may reflect more discredit on his family than his life."

"She shall go," said the father. "She always interfered when I tried to correct my son, and this shall be her punishment."

The Abbé Gabriel and M. Bonnet went back together to the parsonage. It was arranged that Denise and her mother should be there at the time when the two ecclesiastics should set out for Limoges. As they followed the footpath along the outskirts of Upper Montégnac, the younger man had an opportunity of looking more closely than heretofore in the church at this country parson, so highly praised by the vicar-general. He was favorably impressed almost at once by his companion's simple dignified manners, by the magic of his voice, and by the words he spoke, in keeping with the voice. The curé had been but once to the palace since the Bishop had taken Gabriel de Rastignac as his secretary, so that he had scarcely seen the favorite destined to be a bishop some day; he knew that the secretary had great influence, and yet in the dignified kindness of his manner there was a certain independence, as of the curé whom the Church permits to be in some sort a sovereign in his own parish.

As for the young Abbé, his feelings were so far from appearing in his face that they seemed to have hardened it into severity; his expression was not chilly, it was glacial.

A man who could change the disposition and manners of a whole countryside necessarily possessed some faculty of observation, and was more or less of a physiognomist; and even

had the curé been wise only in well-doing, he had just given proof of an unusually keen sensibility. The coolness with which the Bishop's secretary met his advances and responded to his friendliness struck him at once. He could only account for this reception by some secret dissatisfaction on the other's part, and looked back over his conduct, wondering how he could have given offence, and in what the offence lay. There was a short embarrassing silence, broken by the Abbé de Rastignac.

"You have a very poor church, Monsieur le Curé," he remarked, aristocratic insolence in his tones and words.

"It is too small," answered M. Bonnet. "For great Church festivals the old people sit on benches round the porch, and the younger ones stand in a circle in the square down below; they are so silent that those outside can hear."

Gabriel was silent for several moments.

"If the people are so devout, why do you leave the church so bare?" he asked at length.

"Alas! sir, I cannot bring myself to spend money on the building when the poor need it. The poor are the Church. Besides, I should not fear a visitation from my lord Bishop at the Fête-Dieu! Then the poor give the church such things as they have! Did you notice the nails along the walls? They fix a sort of wire trellis-work to them, which the women cover with bunches of flowers; the whole church is dressed in flowers, as it were, which keep fresh till the evening. My poor church, which looked so bare to you, is adorned like a bride, and fragrant with sweet scents; the ground is strewn with leaves, and a path in the midst for the passage of the Holy Sacrament is carpeted with rose petals. For that one day I need not fear comparison with Saint Peter's at Rome. The Holy Father has his gold, and I my flowers; to each his miracle. Ah! the township of Montégnac is poor, but it is Catholic. Once upon a time they used to rob travellers, now any one who passes through the place might drop a bag full of money here, and he would find it when he returned home."

"Such a result speaks strongly in your praise," said Gabriel.

"I have had nothing to do with it," answered the curé, flushing at this incisive epigram. "It has been brought about by the Word of God and the sacramental bread."

"Bread somewhat brown," said the Abbé Gabriel, smiling.

"White bread is only suited to the rich," said the curé humbly.

The Abbé took both M. Bonnet's hands in his, and grasped them cordially.

"Pardon me, Monsieur le Curé," he said; and in a moment the reconciliation was completed by a look in the beautiful blue eyes that went to the depths of the curé's soul.

"My lord Bishop recommended me to put your patience and humility to the proof, but I can go no further. After this little while I see how greatly you have been wronged by the praises of the Liberal party."

Breakfast was ready. Ursule had spread the white cloth, and set new-laid eggs, butter, honey and fruit, cream and coffee, among bunches of flowers on the old-fashioned table in the old-fashioned sitting room. The window that looked out upon the terrace stood open, framed about with green leaves. Clematis grew about the ledge—white starry blossoms, with tiny sheaves of golden crinkled stamens at their hearts to relieve the white. Jessamine climbed up one side of the window, and nasturtiums on the other; above it, a trail of vine, turning red even now, made a rich setting, which no sculptor could hope to render, so full of grace was that lace-work of leaves outlined against the sky.

"You will find life here reduced to its simplest terms," said the curé, smiling, though his face did not belie the sadness of his heart. "If we had known that you were coming —and who could have foreseen the events which have brought you here?—Ursule would have had some trout for you from the torrent; there is a trout-stream in the forest, and the fish

are excellent; but I am forgetting that this is August, and that the Gabou will be dry! My head is very much confused—"

"Are you very fond of this place?" asked the Abbé.

"Yes. If God permits, I shall die curé of Montégnac. I could wish that other and distinguished men, who have thought to do better by becoming lay philanthropists, had taken this way of mine. Modern philanthropy is the bane of society; the principles of the Catholic religion are the one remedy for the evils which leaven the body social. Instead of describing the disease and making it worse by jeremiads, each one should have put his hand to the plow and entered God's vineyard as a simple laborer. My task is far from being ended here, sir; it is not enough to have raised the moral standard of the people, who lived in a frightful state of irreligion when I first came here; I would fain die among a generation fully convinced."

"You have only done your duty," the younger man retorted dryly; he felt a pang of jealousy in his heart.

The other gave him a keen glance.

"Is this yet another test?" he seemed to say—but aloud he answered humbly, "Yes.—I wish every hour of my life," he added, "that every one in the kingdom would do his duty."

The deep underlying significance of those words was still further increased by the tone in which they were spoken. It was clear that here, in this year 1829, was a priest of great intellectual power, great likewise in the simplicity of his life; who, though he did not set up his own judgment against that of his superiors, saw none the less clearly whither the Church and the Monarchy were going.

When the mother and daughter had come, the Abbé left the parsonage and went down to see if the horses had been put in. He was very impatient to return to Limoges. A few minutes later he returned to say that all was in readiness for their departure, and the four set out on their journey. Every creature in Montégnac stood in the road about

the post-house to see them go. The condemned man's mother and sister said not a word; and as for the two ecclesiastics, there were so many topics to be avoided that conversation was difficult, and they could neither appear indifferent nor try to take a cheerful tone. Still endeavoring to discover some neutral ground for their talk as they travelled on, the influences of the great plain seemed to prolong the melancholy silence.

"What made you accept the position of an ecclesiastic?" Gabriel asked at last out of idle curiosity, as the carriage turned into the highroad.

"I have never regarded my office as a 'position,'" the curé answered simply. "I cannot understand how any one can take holy orders for any save the one indefinable and all-powerful reason—a vocation. I know that not a few have become laborers in the great vineyard with hearts worn out in the service of the passions; men who have loved without hope, or whose hopes have been disappointed; men whose lives were blighted when they laid the wife or the woman they loved in the grave; men grown weary of life in a world where in these times nothing, not even sentiments, are stable and secure, where doubt makes sport of the sweetest certainties, and belief is called superstition.

"Some leave political life in times when to be in power seems to be a sort of expiation, when those who are governed look on obedience as an unfortunate necessity; and very many leave a battlefield without standards where powers, by nature opposed, combine to defeat and dethrone the right. I am not supposing that any man can give himself to God for what he may gain. There are some who appear to see in the clergy a means of regenerating our country; but, according to my dim lights, the patriot priest is a contradiction in terms. The priest should belong to God alone.

"I had no wish to offer to our Father, who yet accepts all things, a broken heart and an enfeebled will; I gave myself to Him whole and entire. It was a touching fancy

in the old pagan religion which brought the victim crowned with flowers to the temple of the gods for sacrifice. There is something in that custom that has always appealed to me. A sacrifice is nothing unless it is made graciously.—So the story of my life is very simple, there is not the least touch of romance in it. Still, if you would like to hear a full confession, I will tell you all about myself.

"My family are well-to-do and almost wealthy. My father, a self-made man, is hard and inflexible; he deals the same measure to himself as to his wife and children. I have never seen the faintest smile on his lips. With a hand of iron, a brow of bronze, and an energetic nature at once sullen and morose, he crushed us all—wife and children, clerks and servants, beneath a savage tyranny. I think (I speak for myself alone) that I could have borne the life if the pressure brought to bear on us had been even; but he was crotchety and changeable, and this fitfulness made it unbearable. We never knew whether we had done right or wrong, and the horrible suspense in which we lived at home becomes intolerable in domestic life. It is pleasanter to be out in the streets than in the house. Even as it was, if I had been alone at home, I could have borne all this without a murmur; but there was my mother, whom I loved passionately; the sight of her misery and the continual bitterness of her life broke my heart; and if, as sometimes happened, I surprised her in tears, I was beside myself with rage. I was sent to school; and those years, usually a time of hardship and drudgery, were a sort of golden age for me. I dreaded the holidays. My mother herself was glad to come to see me at the school.

"When I had finished my humanities, I went home and entered my father's office, but I could only stay there a few months; youth was strong in me, my mind might have given way.

"One dreary autumn evening my mother and I took a walk by ourselves along the Boulevard Bourdon, then one of the most depressing spots in Paris, and there I opened my

heart to her. I said that I saw no possible life for me save in the Church. So long as my father lived I was bound to be thwarted in my tastes, my ideas, even in my affections. If I adopted the priest's cassock, he would be compelled to respect me, and in this way I might become a tower of strength to the family should occasion call for it. My mother cried bitterly. At that very time my older brother had enlisted as a common soldier, driven out of the house by the causes which had decided my vocation. (He became a general afterward, and fell in the battle of Leipsic.) I pointed out to my mother as a way of salvation for her that she should marry my sister (as soon as she should be old enough to settle in life) to a man with plenty of character, and look to this new family for support.

"So in 1807, under the pretext of escaping the conscription without expense to my father, and at the same time declaring my vocation, I entered the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice at the age of nineteen. Within those famous old walls I found happiness and peace, troubled only by thoughts of what my mother and sister must be enduring. Things had doubtless grown worse and worse at home, for when they came to see me they upheld me in my determination. Initiated, it may be, by my own pain into the secrets of charity, as the great Apostle has defined it in his sublime epistle, I longed to bind the wounds of the poor and suffering in some out-of-the-way spot; and thereafter to prove, if God deigned to bless my efforts, that the Catholic religion, as put in practice by man, is the one true, good, and noble civilizing agent on earth.

"During those last days of my diaconate, grace doubtless enlightened me. Fully and freely I forgave my father, for I saw that through him I had found my real vocation. But my mother—in spite of a long and tender letter, in which I explained this, and showed how the trace of the finger of God was visible throughout—my mother shed many tears when she saw my hair fall under the scissors of the Church; for she knew how many joys I was renouncing, and did not

know the hidden glories to which I aspired. Women are so tender-hearted. When at last I was God's, I felt an infinite peace. All the cravings, the vanities, and cares that vex so many souls fell away from me. I thought that Heaven would have care for me as for a vessel of its own. I went forth into a world from which all fear was driven out, where the future was sure, where everything is the work of God—even the silence. This quietness of soul is one of the gifts of grace. My mother could not imagine what it was to take a church for a bride; nevertheless, when she saw that I looked serene and happy, she was happy. After my ordination I came to pay a visit to some of my father's relatives in Limousin, and one of these by accident spoke of the state of things in the Montégnac district. With a sudden illumination like lightning, the thought flashed through my inmost soul—'Behold thy vine!' And I came here. So, as you see, sir, my story is quite simple and uninteresting."

As he spoke, Limoges appeared in the rays of the sunset, and at the sight the two women could not keep back their tears.

Meanwhile the young man whom love in its separate guises had come to find, the object of so much outspoken curiosity, hypocritical sympathy, and very keen anxiety, was lying on his prison mattress in the condemned cell. A spy at the door was on the watch for any words that might escape him waking or sleeping, or in one of his wild fits of fury; so bent was justice upon coming at the truth, and on discovering Jean-François's accomplice as well as the stolen money, by every means that the wit of man could devise.

The des Vanneaulx had the police in their interest; the police spies watched through the absolute silence. Whenever the man told off for this duty looked through the hole made for the purpose, he always saw the prisoner in the same attitude, bound in his strait waistcoat, his head tied up by a leather strap to prevent him from tearing the stuff and the thongs with his teeth. Jean-François lay staring at

the ceiling with a fixed desperate gaze, his eyes glowed, and seemed as if they were reddened by the full-pulsed tide of life sent surging through him by terrible thoughts. It was as if an antique statue of Prometheus had become a living man, with the thought of some lost joy gnawing his heart; so when the second *avocat général* came to see him, the visitor could not help showing his surprise at a character so dogged. At sight of any human being admitted into his cell, Jean-François flew into a rage which exceeded everything in the doctors' experience of such affections. As soon as he heard the key turn in the lock, or the bolts drawn in the heavily ironed door, a light froth came to his lips.

In person, Jean-François Tascheron, twenty-five years of age, was short but well made. His hair was stiff and crisp, and grew rather low on his forehead, signs of great energy. The clear, brilliant, yellow eyes, set rather too close together, gave him something the look of a bird of prey. His face was of the round dark-skinned type common in central France. One of his characteristics confirmed Lavater's assertion that the front teeth overlap in those predestined to be murderers; but the general expression of his face spoke of honesty, of simple warm-heartedness of disposition—it would have been nothing extraordinary if a woman had loved such a man passionately. The lines of the fresh mouth, with its dazzling white teeth, were gracious; there was that peculiar shade in the scarlet of the lips which indicates ferocity held in check, and frequently a temperament which thirsts for pleasure and demands free scope for indulgence. There was nothing of the workman's coarseness about him. To the women who watched his trial it seemed evident that it was a woman who had brought flexibility and softness into the fibre inured to toil, the look of distinction into the face of a son of the fields, and grace into his bearing. Women recognize the traces of love in a man, and men are quick to see in a woman whether (to use a colloquial phrase) Love has passed that way.

That evening Jean-François heard the sound as the bolts

were withdrawn and the key was thrust into the lock; he turned his head quickly with the terrible smothered growl with which his fits of fury began; but he trembled violently when through the soft dusk he made out the forms of his mother and sister, and behind the two dear faces another —the curé of Montégnac.

"So this is what those barbarous wretches held in store for me!" he said, and closed his eyes.

Denise, with her prison experience, was suspicious of every least thing in the room; the spy had hidden himself, meaning, no doubt, to return; she fled to her brother, laid her tear-stained face against his, and said in his ear, "Can they hear what we say?"

"I should rather think they can, or they would not have sent you here," he answered aloud. "I have asked as a favor this long while that I might not see any of my family."

"What a way they have treated him!" cried the mother, turning to the curé. "My poor boy! my poor boy! . . ." She sank down on the foot of the mattress, and hid her face in the priest's cassock. The curé stood upright beside her. "I cannot bear to see him bound and tied up like that and put into that sack . . ."

"If Jean will promise me to be good, to make no attempt on his life, and to behave well while we are with him, I will ask for leave to unbind him; but I shall suffer for the slightest infraction of his promise."

"I have such a craving to stretch myself out and move freely, dear M. Bonnet," said the condemned man, his eyes filling with tears, "that I give you my word I will do as you wish."

The curé went out, the jailer came, and the strait waistcoat was taken off.

"You are not going to kill me this evening, are you?" asked the turnkey.

Jean made no answer.

"Poor brother!" said Denise, bringing out a basket, which had been strictly searched, "there are one or two

things here that you are fond of; here, of course, they grudge you every morsel you eat."

She brought out fruit gathered as soon as she knew that she might see her brother in prison, and a cake which her mother had put aside at once. This thoughtfulness of theirs, which recalled old memories, his sister's voice and movements, the presence of his mother and the curé—all combined to bring about a reaction in Jean. He burst into tears.

"Ah! Denise," he said, "I have not made a meal these six months past; I have eaten because hunger drove me to eat, that is all."

Mother and daughter went out and returned, and came and went. The housewifely instinct of seeing to a man's comfort put heart into them, and at last they set supper before their poor darling. The people of the prison helped them in this, having received orders to do all in their power compatible with the safe custody of the condemned man. The des Vanneaulx, with unkindly kindness, had done their part toward securing the comfort of the man in whose power their heritage lay. So Jean by these means was to know a last gleam of family happiness—happiness overshadowed by the sombre gloom of the prison and death.

"Was my appeal rejected?" he asked M. Bonnet.

"Yes, my boy. There is nothing left to you now but to make an end worthy of a Christian. This life of ours is as nothing compared with the life which awaits us; you must think of your happiness in eternity. Your account with men is settled by the forfeit of your life, but God requires more, a life is too small a thing for Him."

"Forfeit my life? . . . Ah, you do not know all that I must leave behind."

Denise looked at her brother, as if to remind him that prudence was called for even in matters of religion.

"Let us say nothing of that," he went on, eating fruit with an eagerness that denoted a fierce and restless fire within. "When must I—?"

"*No! no!* nothing of that before me!" cried the mother.

"I should be easier if I knew," he said in a low voice, turning to the curé.

"The same as ever!" exclaimed M. Bonnet, and he bent to say in Jean's ear—"If you make your peace with God to-night, and your repentance permits me to give you absolution, it shall be to-morrow."—Aloud he added, "We have already gained something by calming you."

At these last words, Jean grew white to the lips, his eyes contracted with a heavy scowl, his features quivered with the coming storm of rage.

"What, am I calm?" he asked himself. Luckily his eyes met the tearful eyes of his sister Denise, and he regained the mastery over himself.

"Ah, well," he said, looking at the curé, "I could not listen to any one but you. They knew well how to tame me," and he suddenly dropped his head on his mother's shoulder.

"Listen, dear," his mother said, weeping, "our dear M. Bonnet is risking his own life by undertaking to be with you on the way to"—she hesitated, and then finished—"to eternal life."

And she lowered Jean's head and held it for a few moments on her heart.

"Will he go with me?" asked Jean, looking at the curé, who took it upon himself to bow his head.—"Very well, I will listen to him. I will do everything that he requires of me."

"Promise me that you will," said Denise, "for your soul must be saved; that is what we are all thinking of. And then—would you have it said in Limoges and all the country round that a Tascheron could not die like a man? After all, just think that all that you lose here you may find again in heaven, where forgiven souls will meet again."

This preternatural effort parched the heroic girl's throat. Like her mother, she was silent, but she had won the victory. The criminal, hitherto frantic that justice had snatched away his cup of bliss, was thrilled with the sublime doctrine of the Catholic Church, expressed so artlessly by his sister. Every woman, even a peasant girl like Denise Tascheron,

possesses at need this tender tact; does not every woman love to think that love is eternal? Denise had touched two responsive chords. Awakened pride roused other qualities numbed by such utter misery and stunned by despair. Jean took his sister's hand in his and kissed it, and held her to his heart in a manner profoundly significant; tenderly, but in a mighty grasp.

"There," he said, "everything must be given up! That was my last heart-throb, my last thought—intrusted to you, Denise." And he gave her such a look as a man gives at some solemn moment, when he strives to impress his whole soul on another soul.

A whole last testament lay in the words and the thoughts; the mother and sister, the curé and Jean, understood so well that these were mute bequests to be faithfully executed and loyally demanded that they turned away their faces to hide their tears and the thoughts that might be read in their eyes. Those few words, spoken in the death agony of passion, were the farewell to fatherhood and all that was sweetest on earth —the earnest of a Catholic renunciation of the things of earth. The curé, awed by the majesty of human nature, by all its greatness even in sin, measured the force of this mysterious passion by the enormity of the crime, and raised his eyes as if to entreat God's mercy. In that action the touching consolation, the infinite tenderness of the Catholic faith were revealed—a religion that shows itself so human, so loving, by the hand stretched down to teach mankind the laws of a higher world, so awful, so divine, by the hand held out to guide him to heaven. It was Denise who had just discovered to the curé, in this mysterious manner, the spot where the rock would yield the streams of repentance. Suddenly Jean uttered a blood-curdling cry, like some hyena caught by the hunters. Memories had awakened.

"No! no! no!" he cried, falling upon his knees. "I want to live! Mother, take my place. Change clothes with me. I could escape! Have pity! Have pity! Go to the King and tell him . . ."

He stopped short, a horrible sound like the growl of a wild beast broke from him; he clutched fiercely at the curé's cassock.

"Go," M. Bonnet said in a low voice, turning to the two women, who were quite overcome by this scene. Jean heard the word, and lifted his head. He looked up at his mother and sister, and kissed their feet.

"Let us say good-by," he said. "Do not come back any more. Leave me alone with M. Bonnet; and do not be anxious about me now," he added, as he clasped his mother and sister in a tight embrace, in which he seemed as though he would fain put all the life that was in him.

"How can any one go through all this and live?" asked Denise as they reached the wicket.

It was about eight o'clock in the evening when they separated. The Abbé de Rastignac was waiting at the gate of the prison, and asked the two women for news.

"He will make his peace with God," said Denise. "If he has not repented already, repentance is near at hand."

A few minutes later the Bishop learned that the Church would triumph in this matter, and that the condemned man would go to his execution with the most edifying religious sentiments. The public prosecutor was with his lordship, who expressed a wish to see the curé. It was midnight before M. Bonnet came. The Abbé Gabriel, who had been going to and fro between the palace and the prison, considered that the Bishop's carriage ought to be sent for him, for the poor man was so exhausted that he could scarcely stand. The thought of to-morrow's horrible journey, the anguish of soul which he had witnessed, the full and entire repentance of this member of his flock, who broke down completely at last when the great forecast of Eternity was put before him—all these things had combined to wear out M. Bonnet's strength, for with his nervous temperament and electric swiftness of apprehension, he was quick to feel the sorrows of others as if they were his own.

Souls like this beautiful soul are so open to receive the

impressions, the sorrows, passions, and sufferings of those toward whom they are drawn, that they feel the pain as if it were in very truth their own, and this in a manner which is torture; for their clearer eyes can measure the whole extent of the misfortune in a way impossible to those blinded by the egoism of love or paroxysms of grief. In this respect such a confessor as M. Bonnet is an artist who feels, instead of an artist who judges.

In the drawing-room at the palace, where the two vicars-general, the public prosecutor, and M. de Granville, and the Abbé de Rastignac were waiting, it dawned upon M. Bonnet that he was expected to bring news.

"Monsieur le Curé," the Bishop began, "have you obtained any confessions with which you may in confidence enlighten justice without failing in your duty?"

"Before I gave absolution to that poor lost child, my lord, I was not content that his repentance should be as full and entire as the Church could require; I still further insisted on the restitution of the money."

"I came here to the palace about that restitution," said the public prosecutor. "Some light will be thrown on obscure points in the case by the way in which it is made. He certainly has accomplices—"

"With the interests of man's justice I have no concern," the curé said. "I do not know how or where the restitution will be made, but made it will be. When my lord Bishop summoned me here to one of my own parishioners, he replaced me in the exact conditions which give a curé in his own parish the rights which a bishop exercises in his diocese —ecclesiastical obedience and discipline apart."

"Quite right," said the Bishop. "But the point is to obtain a voluntary confession before justice from the condemned man."

"My mission was simply to bring a soul to God," returned M. Bonnet.

M. de Grancour shrugged his shoulders slightly, and the Abbé Dutheil nodded approval.

"Tascheron, no doubt, wants to screen some one whom a restitution would identify," said the public prosecutor.

"Monsieur," retorted the curé, "I know absolutely nothing which might either confirm or contradict your conjecture; and, moreover, the secrets of the confessional are inviolable."

"So the restitution will be made?" asked the man of law.

"Yes, monsieur," answered the man of God.

"That is enough for me," said the public prosecutor. He relied upon the cleverness of the police to find and follow up any clew, as if passion and personal interest were not keener witted than any detective.

Two days later, on a market day, Jean-François Tascheron went to his death in a manner which left all pious and politic souls nothing to desire. His humility and piety were exemplary; he kissed with fervor the crucifix which M. Bonnet held out to him with trembling hands. The unfortunate man was closely scanned; all eyes were on the watch to see the direction his glances might take; would he look up at one of the houses or gaze on some face in the crowd? His discretion was complete and inviolable. He met his death like a Christian, penitent and forgiven.

The poor curé of Montégnac was taken away unconscious from the foot of the scaffold, though he had not so much as set eyes on the fatal machine.

The next day at nightfall, three leagues away from Limoges, out on the highroad, and in a lonely spot, Denise Tascheron suddenly stopped. Exhausted though she was with physical weariness and sorrow, she begged her father to allow her to go back to Limoges with Louis-Marie Tascheron, one of her brothers.

"What more do you want to do in that place?" her father asked sharply, raising his eyebrows and frowning.

"We have not only to pay the lawyer, father," she said in his ear; "there is something else. The money that he hid must be given back."

"That is only right," said the rigorously honest man, fumbling in a leather purse which he carried about him.

"No," Denise said swiftly, "he is your son no longer; and those who blessed, not those who cursed him, ought to pay the lawyer's fees."

"We will wait for you at Havre," her father said.

Denise and her brother crept into the town again before it was day. Though the police learned later on that two of the Tascherons had come back, they never could discover their lodging. It was near four o'clock when Denise and her brother went to the higher end of the town, stealing along close to the walls. The poor girl dared not look up, lest the eyes which should meet hers had seen her brother's head fall. First of all, she had sought out M. Bonnet, and he, unwell though he was, had consented to act as Denise's father and guardian for the time being. With him they went to the barrister, who lived in the Rue de la Comédie.

"Good-day, poor children," the lawyer began, with a bow to M. Bonnet. "How can I be of use to you? Perhaps you want me to make application for your brother's body?"

"No, sir," said Denise, her tears flowing at the thought, which had not occurred to her; "I have come to pay our debt to you, in so far as money can repay an eternal debt."

"Sit down a moment," said the lawyer, seeing that Denise and the curé were both standing. Denise turned away to draw from her stays two notes of five hundred francs, pinned to her shift. Then she sat down and handed over the bills to her brother's counsel. The curé looked at the lawyer with a light in his eyes, which soon filled with tears.

"Keep it," the barrister said; "keep the money yourself, my poor girl. Rich people do not pay for a lost cause in this generous way."

"I cannot do as you ask, sir, it is impossible," said Denise.

"Then the money does not come from you?" the barrister asked quickly.

"Pardon me," she replied, with a questioning glance at M. Bonnet—would God be angry with her for that lie?

The curé kept his eyes lowered.

"Very well," said the barrister, and, keeping one of the notes in his hand, he gave the other to the curé, "then I will divide it with the poor. And now, Denise, this is certainly mine"—he held out the note as he spoke—"will you give me your velvet ribbon and gold cross in exchange for it? I will hang the cross above my chimney-piece in memory of the purest and kindest girl's heart which I shall ever meet with, I doubt not, in my career."

"There is no need to buy it," cried Denise, "I will give it you," and she took off her gilt cross and handed it to the lawyer.

"Very well, sir," said the curé, "I accept the five hundred francs to pay the expenses of exhuming and removing the poor boy's body to the churchyard at Montégnac. Doubtless God has forgiven him; Jean will rise again with all my flock at the Last Day, when the just and the penitent sinner will be summoned to sit at the Father's right hand."

"So be it," said the barrister. He took Denise's hand and drew her toward him to put a kiss on her forehead, a movement made with another end in view.

"My child," he said, "nobody at Montégnac has such a thing as a five hundred franc note; they are rather scarce in Limoges; people don't take them here without asking something for changing them. So this money has been given to you by somebody; you are not going to tell me who it was, and I do not ask you, but listen to this: if you have anything left to do here which has any reference to your poor brother, mind how you set about it. M. Bonnet and you and your brother will all three of you be watched by spies. People know that your family have gone away. If anybody recognizes you here, you will be surrounded before you suspect it."

"Alas!" she said, "I have nothing left to do here."

"She is cautious," said the lawyer to himself, as he went to the door with her. "She has been warned, so let her extricate herself."

It was late September, but the days were as hot as in the summer. The Bishop was giving a dinner-party. The local authorities, the public prosecutor and the first *avocat général* were among the guests. Discussions were started, which grew lively in the course of the evening, and it was very late before they broke up. Whist and backgammon, that game beloved of bishops, were the order of the day. It happened that about eleven o'clock the public prosecutor stepped out upon the upper terrace, and from the corner where he stood saw a light on the island, which the Abbé Gabriel and the Bishop had already fixed upon as the central spot and clew to the inexplicable tangle about Tascheron's crime—on Véronique's Isle of France in fact. There was no apparent reason why anybody should kindle a fire in the middle of the Vienne at that time of night—then, all at once, the idea which had struck the Bishop and his secretary flashed upon the public prosecutor's brain, with a light as sudden as that of the fire which shot up out of the distant darkness.

"What a set of great fools we have all been!" cried he, "but we have the accomplices now."

He went up to the drawing-room again, found out M. de Granville, and said a word or two in his ear; then both of them vanished. But the Abbé de Rastignac, courteously attentive, watched them go out, saw that they went toward the terrace, and noticed too that fire on the shore of the island.

"It is all over with her," thought he.

The messengers of justice arrived on the spot—too late. Denise and Louis-Marie (whom his brother Jean had taught to dive) were there, it is true, on the bank of the Vienne at a place pointed out by Jean; but Louis-Marie had already dived four times, and each time had brought up with him twenty thousand francs in gold. The first instalment was secured in a bandanna with the four corners tied up. As soon as the water had been wrung from the handkerchief, it was thrown on a great fire of dry sticks, kindled beforehand. A shawl contained the second, and the third was

secured in a lawn handkerchief. Just as Denise was about to fling the fourth wrapper into the fire, the police came up accompanied by a commissary, and pounced upon a very important clew, as they thought, which Denise suffered them to seize without the slightest emotion. It was a man's pocket-handkerchief, which still retained some stains of blood in spite of its long immersion. Questioned forthwith as to her proceedings, Denise said that she had brought the stolen money out of the river, as her brother bade her. To the commissary, inquiring why she had burned the wrappings, she answered that she was following out her brother's instructions. Asked what the wrappings were, she replied boldly, and with perfect truth, "A bandanna handkerchief, a lawn handkerchief, and a shawl."

The handkerchief which had just been seized belonged to her brother.

This fishing expedition and the circumstances accompanying it made plenty of talk in Limoges. The shawl in particular confirmed the belief that there was a love affair at the bottom of Tascheron's crime.

"He is dead, but he shields her still," commented one lady, when she heard these final revelations, so cleverly rendered useless.

"Perhaps there is some married man in Limoges who will find that he is a bandanna short, but he will perforce hold his tongue," smiled the public prosecutor.

"Little mistakes in one's wardrobe have come to be so compromising, that I shall set about verifying mine this very evening," said old Mme. Perret, smiling too.

"Whose are the dainty little feet that left the footmarks, so carefully erased?" asked M. de Granville.

"Pshaw! perhaps they belong to some ugly woman," returned the *avocat général.*

"She has paid dear for her slip," remarked the Abbé de Grancour.

"Do you know what all this business goes to prove?" put in the *avocat general.* "It just shows how much women

have lost through the Revolution, which obliterated social distinctions. Such a passion is only to be met with nowadays in a man who knows that there is an enormous distance between him and the woman he loves."

"You credit love with many vanities," returned the Abbé Dutheil.

"What does Mme. Graslin think?" asked the prefect.

"What would you have her think? She was confined, as she told me she would be, on the day of the execution, and has seen nobody since; she is dangerously ill," said M. de Granville.

Meanwhile, in another room in Limoges, an almost comic scene was taking place. The des Vanneaulx's friends were congratulating them upon the restitution of their inheritance.

"Well, well," said Mme. des Vanneaulx, "they ought to have let him off, poor man. It was love, and not mercenary motives, that brought him to it; he was neither vicious nor wicked."

"He behaved like a thorough gentleman," said the Sieur des Vanneaulx. "*If I knew where his family was, I would do something for them;* they are good people, those Taschерons."

When Mme. Graslin was well enough to rise, toward the end of the year 1829, after the long illness which followed her confinement and obliged her to keep her bed in absolute solitude and quiet, she heard her husband speak of a rather considerable piece of business which he wanted to conclude. The Navarreins family thought of selling the forest of Montégnac and the waste lands which they owned in the neighborhood. Graslin had not yet put into execution a clause in his wife's marriage settlement, which required that her dowry should be invested in land; he had preferred to put her money out at interest through the bank, and already had doubled her capital. On this, Véronique seemed to recol-

lect the name of Montégnac, and begged her husband to carry out the contract by purchasing the estate for her.

M. Graslin wished very much to see M. Bonnet, to ask for information concerning the forest and lands which the Duc de Navarreins thought of selling. The Duc de Navarreins, be it said, foresaw the hideous struggle which the Prince de Polignac had made inevitable between the Liberals and the Bourbon dynasty; and augured the worst, for which reasons he was one of the boldest opponents of the Coup d'Etat. The Duke had sent his man of business to Limoges with instructions to sell, if a bidder could be found for so large a sum of money, for His Grace recollected the Revolution of 1789 too well not to profit by the lessons then taught to the aristocracy. It was this man of business who, for more than a month, had been at close quarters with Graslin, the shrewdest old fox in Limousin, and the only man whom common report singled out as being able to pay down the price of so large an estate on the spot.

At a word sent by the Abbé Dutheil, M. Bonnet hastened to Limoges and the Hotel Graslin. Véronique would have prayed the curé to dine with her; but the banker only allowed M. Bonnet to go up to his wife's room after he had kept him a full hour in his private office, and obtained information which satisfied him so well that he concluded his purchase out of hand, and the forest and domain of Montégnac became his (Graslin's) for five hundred thousand francs. He acquiesced in his wife's wish, stipulating that this purchase and any outlay relating thereto should be held to accomplish the clause in her marriage contract as to her fortune. Graslin did this the more willingly because the piece of honesty now cost him nothing.

At the time of Graslin's purchase the estate consisted of the forest of Montégnac, some thirty thousand acres in extent, but too inaccessible to bring in any money, the ruined castle, the gardens, and some five thousand acres in the uncultivated plains under Montégnac. Graslin made several more purchases at once, so as to have the whole of

the first peak of the Corrézien range in his hands, for there the vast forest of Montégnac came to an end. Since the taxes had been levied upon it, the Duc de Navarreins had not drawn fifteen thousand francs a year from the manor, formerly one of the richest tenures in the kingdom. The lands had escaped sale when put up under the Convention, partly because of their barrenness, partly because it was a recognized fact that nothing could be made of them.

When the curé came face to face with the woman of whom he had heard, a woman whose cleverness and piety were well known, he started in spite of himself. At this time Véronique had entered upon the third period of her life, a period in which she was to grow greater by the exercise of the loftiest virtues, and become a totally different woman. To the Rafael's Madonna, hidden beneath the veil of smallpox scars, a beautiful, noble, and impassioned woman had succeeded, a woman afterward laid low by inward sorrows, from which a saint emerged. Her complexion had taken the sallow tint seen in the austere faces of Abbesses of ascetic life. A yellowish hue had overspread the temples, grown less imperious now. The lips were paler, the red of the opening pomegranate flower had changed into the paler crimson of the Bengal rose. Between the nose and the corners of the eyes sorrow had worn two pearly channels, down which many tears had coursed in secret; much weeping had worn away the traces of smallpox. It was impossible not to fix your eyes on the spot where a network of tiny blue veins stood out swollen and distended with the full pulses that throbbed there, as if they fed the source of many tears. The faint brownish tinge about the eyes alone remained, but there were dark circles under them now, and wrinkles in the eyelids which told of terrible suffering. The lines in the hollow cheeks bore record of solemn thoughts. The chin, too, had shrunk, it had lost its youthful fulness of outline, and this scarcely to the advantage of a face which wore an expression of pitiless austerity, confined however solely to Véronique herself. At twenty-nine years of age her hair, one of her

greatest beauties, had faded and grown scanty; she had been obliged to pull out a large quantity of white hair, bleached during her confinement. Her thinness was shocking to see. In spite of the doctor's orders, she had persisted in nursing her child herself; and the doctor was not disposed to let people forget this when all his evil prognostications were so thoroughly fulfilled.

"See what a difference a single confinement has made in a woman!" said he. "And she worships that child of hers; but I have always noticed that the more a child costs the mother, the dearer it is."

All that remained of youth in Véronique's face lay in her eyes, wan though they were. An untamed fire flashed from the dark blue iris; all the life that had deserted the cold impassive mask of a face, expressionless now save for the charitable look which it wore when her poorer neighbors were spoken of, seemed to have taken refuge there. So the curé's first dismay and surprise abated somewhat as he went on to explain to her how much good a resident landowner might effect in Montégnac, and for a moment Véronique's face grew beautiful, lighted up by this unexpected hope which began to shine in upon her.

"I will go there," she said. "It shall be my property. I will ask M. Graslin to put some funds at my disposal, and I will enter into your charitable work with all my might. Montégnac shall be cultivated, we will find water somewhere to irrigate the waste land in the plain. You are striking the rock, like Moses, and tears will flow from it!"

The curé of Montégnac spoke of Mme. Graslin as a saint when his friends in Limoges asked him about her.

The very day after the purchase was completed, Graslin sent an architect to Montégnac. He was determined to restore the castle, the gardens, terraces, and park, to reclaim the forest by a plantation, putting an ostentatious activity into all that he did.

Two years later a great misfortune befell Mme. Graslin. Her husband, in spite of his prudence, was involved in the

commercial and financial disasters of 1830. The thought of bankruptcy, or of losing three millions, the gains of a lifetime of toil, were both intolerable to him. The worry and anxiety aggravated the inflammatory disease always lurking in his system, the result of impure blood. He was compelled to take to his bed. In Véronique a friendly feeling toward Graslin had developed during her pregnancy, and dealt a fatal blow to the hopes of her admirer, M. de Granville. By careful nursing she tried to save her husband's life, but only succeeded in prolonging a suffering existence for a few months. This respite, however, was very useful to Grossetete, who, foreseeing the end, consulted with his old comrade, and made all the necessary arrangements for a prompt realization.

In April, 1831, Graslin died, and his widow's despairing grief only sobered down into Christian resignation. From the first Véronique had wished to give up her whole fortune to her husband's creditors; but M. Graslin's estate proved to be more than sufficient. It was Grossetete who wound up his affairs, and two months after the settlement Mme. Graslin found herself the mistress of the domains of Montégnac and of six hundred and sixty thousand francs, all her own; and no blot rested on her son's name. No one had lost anything through Graslin—not even his wife; and Francis Graslin had about a hundred thousand francs.

Then M. de Granville, who had reason to know Véronique's nature and loftiness of soul, came forward as a suitor; but, to the amazement of all Limoges, Mme. Graslin refused the newly-appointed public prosecutor, on the ground that second marriages were discountenanced by the Church. Grossetete, a man of unerring forecast and sound sense, advised Véronique to invest the rest of M. Graslin's fortune and her own in the Funds, and effected this for her himself at once, in the month of July, when the three per cents stood at fifty. So Francis had an income of six thousand livres, and his mother about forty thousand. Véronique was still the greatest fortune in the department.

All was settled at last, and Mme. Graslin gave out that she meant to leave Limoges to live near to M. Bonnet. Again she sent for the curé, to consult him about his work at Montegnac, in which she was determined to share; but he generously tried to dissuade her, and to make it clear to her that her place was in society.

"I have sprung from the people, and I mean to return to them," said she.

The curé's great love for his own village resisted the more feebly when he learned that Mme. Graslin had arranged to make over her house in Limoges to M. Grossetête. Certain sums were due to the banker, and he took the house at its full value in settlement.

Mme. Graslin finally left Limoges toward the end of August, 1831. A troop of friends gathered about her, and went with her as far as the outskirts of the town; some of them went the whole first stage of the journey. Véronique travelled in a calèche with her mother; the Abbé Dutheil, recently appointed to a bishopric, sat opposite them with old M. Grossetête. As they went through the Place d'Aine, Véronique's emotion was almost uncontrollable; her face contracted; every muscle quivered with the pain; she snatched up her child, and held him tightly to her in a convulsive grasp, while La Sauviat tried to cover her emotion by following her example—it seemed that La Sauviat was not unprepared for something of this kind.

Chance so ordered it that Mme. Graslin caught a glimpse of the house where her father had lived; she clutched Mme. Sauviat's hand, great tears filled her eyes and rolled down her cheeks. When Limoges was fairly left behind, she turned and took a last farewell glance; and all her friends noticed a certain look of happiness in her face. When the public prosecutor, the young man of five-and-twenty whom she had declined to marry, came up and kissed her hand with lively expressions of regret, the newly-made Bishop noticed something strange in Véronique's eyes: the dark pupils dilated till the blue became a thin ring about them.

It was unmistakable that some violent revulsion took place within her.

"Now I shall never see him again!" she said in her mother's ear, but there was not the slightest trace of feeling in the impassive old face as Mme. Sauviat received that confidence.

Grossetête, the shrewd old banker, sitting opposite, watching the women with keen eyes, had not discovered that Véronique hated this man, whom for that matter she received as a visitor. In things of this kind a churchman is far clearer-sighted than other men, and the Bishop surprised Véronique by a glance that revealed an ecclesiastic's perspicacity.

"You have no regret in leaving Limoges?" the Bishop said to Mme. Graslin.

"You are leaving the town," she replied. "And M. Grossetête scarcely ever comes among us now," she added, with a smile for her old friend as he said good-by.

The Bishop went the whole of the way to Montégnac with Véronique.

"I ought to have made this journey in mourning," she said in her mother's ear as they walked up the hill near Saint-Léonard.

The old woman turned her crabbed, wrinkled face, and laid her finger on her lips; then she pointed to the Bishop, who was giving the child a terrible scrutiny. Her mother's gesture first, and yet more the significant expression in the Bishop's eyes, made Mme. Graslin shudder. The light died out of her face as she looked out across the wide gray stretch of plain before Montégnac, and melancholy overcame her. All at once she saw the curé coming to meet her, and made him take a seat in the carriage.

"This is your domain," said M. Bonnet, indicating the level waste.

IV

MADAME GRASLIN AT MONTÉGNAC

IN A FEW MOMENTS the township of Montégnac came in sight; the hillside and the conspicuous new buildings upon it shone golden in the light of the sunset; it was a lovely landscape like an oasis in the desert, with a picturesque charm of its own, due to the contrast with its setting. Mme. Graslin's eyes began to fill with tears. The curé pointed out a broad white track like a scar on the hillside.

"That is what my parishioners have done to show their gratitude to their lady of the manor," he said. "We can drive the whole way to the chateau. The road is finished now, and has not cost you a sou; we shall put in a row of trees beside it in two months' time. My Lord Bishop can imagine how much toil, thought, and devotion went to the making of such a change."

"And they have done this themselves?" said the Bishop.

"They would take nothing in return, my lord. The poorest lent a hand, for they all knew that one who would be like a mother to them was coming to live among us."

There was a crowd at the foot of the hill, all the village was there. Guns were fired off, and mortars exploded, and then the two prettiest girls of Montégnac, in white dresses, came to offer flowers and fruit to Mme. Graslin.

"That I should be welcomed here like this!" she cried, clutching M. Bonnet's hand as if she felt that she was falling over a precipice.

The crowd went up as far as the great iron gateway, whence Mme. Graslin could see her chateau. At first sight the splendor of her dwelling was a shock to her. Stone for building is scarce in this district, for the native granite is

hard and exceedingly difficult to work; so Graslin's architect had used brick for the main body of the great building, there being plenty of brick earth in the forest of Montégnac, and wood for the felling. All the woodwork and stone in fact came also from the forest and the quarries in it. But for these economies, Graslin must have been put to a ruinous expense; but, as it was, the principal outlay was for wages, carriage, and salaries, and the money circulating in the township had put new life into it.

At a first glance the chateau stood up a huge red mass, scored with dark lines of mortar, and outlined with gray, for the facings and quoins and the string courses along each story were of granite, each block being cut in facets diamond fashion. The surface of the brick walls round the courtyard (a sloping oval like the courtyard of Versailles) was broken by slabs of granite surrounded by bosses, and set at equal distances. Shrubs had been planted under the walls, with a view to obtaining the contrasts of their various foliage. Two handsome iron gateways gave access on the one hand to the terrace which overlooked Montégnac, and on the other to a farm and outbuildings. The great gateway at the summit of the new road, which had just been finished, had a neat lodge on either side, built in the style of the sixteenth century.

The façade of the chateau fronted the courtyard and faced the west. It consisted of three towers, the central towers being connected with the one on either side of it by two wings. The back of the house was precisely similar, and looked over the gardens toward the east. There was but one window in each tower on the side of the courtyard and gardens, each wing having three. The centre tower was built something after the fashion of a campanile, the cornerstones were vermiculated, and here some delicate sculptured work had been sparingly introduced. Art is timid in the provinces; and though in 1829 some progress had been made in architectural ornament (thanks to certain writers), the owners of houses shrank at that time from an expense which

lack of competition and scarcity of craftsmen rendered somewhat formidable.

The tower at either end (three windows in depth) was crowned by a high-pitched roof, with a granite balustrade by way of decoration; each angle of the pyramid was sharply cut by an elegant balcony lined with lead, and surrounded by cast-iron railings, and an elegantly sculptured window occupying each side of the roof. All the door and window cornices on each story were likewise ornamented with carved work copied from Genoese palace fronts. The three side windows of the southern tower looked out over Montégnac, the northern gave a view of the forest.

From the eastern windows you could see beyond the gardens that part of Montégnac where the Tascherons had lived, and far down below in the valley the road which led to the chief town in the arrondissement. From the west front which gave upon the courtyard you saw the wide map of the plain stretching away on the Montégnac side to the mountains of the Corrèze, and elsewhere to the circle of the horizon, where it blended with the sky.

The wings were low, the single story being built in the mansard roof, in the old French style, but the towers at either end rose a story higher. The central tower was crowned by a sort of flattened dome like the Clock Towers of the Tuileries or the Louvre; the single room in the turret was a sort of belvedere, and fitted with a turret-clock. Ridge tiles had been used for economy's sake; the massive balks of timber from the forest readily carried the enormous weight of the roof.

Graslin's "Folly," as he called the chateau, had brought five hundred thousand francs into the commune. He had planned the road before he died, and the commune out of gratitude had finished it. Montégnac had moreover grown considerably. Behind the stables and outbuildings, on the north side of the hill where it slopes gradually down into the plain, Graslin had begun to build the steadings of a farm on a large scale, which showed that he had meant to turn the

waste land in the plain to account. The plantations considered indispensable by M. Bonnet were still proceeding under the direction of a head gardener with six men, who were lodged in the outbuildings.

The whole ground floor of the chateau, taken up by sitting-rooms, had been splendidly furnished, but the second story was rather bare, M. Graslin's death having suspended the upholsterer's operations.

"Ah! my lord," said Mme. Graslin, turning to the Bishop, after they had been through the chateau, "I had thought to live here in a thatched cottage. Poor M. Graslin committed many follies—"

"And you—" the Bishop added, after a pause, and Mme. Graslin's light shudder did not escape him—"*you* are about to do charitable deeds, are you not?"

She went to her mother, who held little Francis by the hand, laid her hand on the old woman's arm, and went with the two as far as the long terrace which rose above the church and the parsonage; all the houses in the village, rising stepwise up the hillside, could be seen at once. The curé took possession of M. Dutheil, and began to point out the various features of the landscape; but the eyes of both ecclesiastics soon turned to the terrace, where Véronique and her mother stood motionless as statues; the older woman took out a handkerchief and wiped her eyes, her daughter leaned upon the balustrade, and seemed to be pointing out the church below.

"What is the matter, madame?" the Curé Bonnet asked, turning to La Sauviat.

"Nothing," answered Mme. Graslin, coming toward the two priests and facing them. "I did not know that the churchyard would be right under my eyes—"

"You can have it removed; the law is on your side."

"*The law!*" the words broke from her like a cry of pain.

Again the Bishop looked at Véronique. But she—tired of meeting that sombre glance, which seemed to lay bare the soul and discover her secret in its depths, a secret buried in

a grave in that churchyard—cried out: "Very well, then—*yes!*"

The Bishop laid his hand over his eyes, so overwhelmed by this that for some moments he stood lost in thought.

"Hold her up," cried the old mother; "she is turning pale."

"The air here is so keen, I have taken a chill," murmured Mme. Graslin, and she sank fainting as the two ecclesiastics caught her in their arms. They carried her into the house, and when she came to herself again she saw the Bishop and the curé kneeling in prayer for her.

"May the angel which has visited you ever stay beside you!" the Bishop said, as he gave her his blessing. "Adieu, my daughter."

Mme. Graslin burst into tears at the words.

"Is she really saved?" cried the old mother.

"In this world and in the next," the Bishop turned to answer, as he left the room.

Mme. Graslin had been carried by her mother's orders to a room on the first floor of the southern tower; the windows looked out upon the churchyard and the south side of Montégnac. Here she chose to remain, and installed herself there as best she could with her maid Aline, and little Francis. Mme. Sauviat's room naturally was near her daughter's.

It was some days before Mme. Graslin recovered from the cruel agitation which prostrated her on the day of her arrival, and, moreover, her mother insisted that she must stay in bed in the morning. In the evening, however, Véronique came to sit on a bench on the terrace, and looked down on the church and parsonage and into the churchyard. In spite of mute opposition on Mme. Sauviat's part, Véronique contracted a habit of always sitting in the same place and giving way to melancholy broodings; it was almost a mania.

"Madame is dying," Aline said to the old mother.

At last the two women spoke to the curé; and he, good man, who had shrunk from intruding himself upon Mme.

Graslin, came assiduously to see her when he learned that she was suffering from some malady of the soul, carefully timing his visits so that he always found Véronique and the child, both in mourning, out on the terrace. The country was already beginning to look dreary and sombre in the early days of October.

When Véronique first came to the chateau, M. Bonnet had seen at once that she was suffering from some hidden wound, but he thought it better to wait until his future penitent should give him her confidence. One evening, however, he saw an expression in Mme. Graslin's eyes that warned him to hesitate no longer—the dull apathy of a mind brooding over the thought of death. He set himself to check the progress of this cruel disease of the mind.

At first there was a sort of struggle between them, a fence of empty words, each of them striving to disguise their thoughts. The evening was chilly, but, for all that, Véronique sat out on the granite bench with little Francis on her knee. She could not see the churchyard, for Mme. Sauviat, leaning against the parapet, deliberately shut it out from sight. Aline stood waiting to take the child indoors. It was the seventh time that the curé had found Véronique there on the terrace. He spoke: "I used to think that you were merely sad, madame, but," and he lowered his voice and spoke in her ear, "this is despair. Despair is neither Christian nor Catholic."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, with an intent glance at the sky, and a bitter smile stole over her lips, "what would the Church leave to a damned soul, if not despair?"

Her words revealed to the curé how far this soul had been laid waste.

"Ah! you are making for yourself a hell out of this hillside, when it should rather be a Calvary whence your soul might lift itself up toward Heaven."

"I am too humble now," she said, "to put myself on such a pedestal," and her tone was a revelation of the depth of her self-scorn.

Then a sudden light flashed across the curé—one of the inspirations which come so often and so naturally to noble and pure souls who live with God. He took up the child and kissed him on the forehead. "Poor little one!" he said, in a fatherly voice, and gave the child to the nurse, who took him away. Mme. Sauviat looked at her daughter, and saw how powerfully those words had wrought on her, for Véronique's eyes, long dry, were wet with tears. Then she too went, with a sign to the priest.

"Will you take a walk on the terrace?" suggested M. Bonnet when they were alone. "You are in my charge; I am accountable to God for your sick soul," and they went toward the end of the terrace above "Tascherons'."

"Leave me to recover from my prostration," she said.

"Your prostration is the result of pernicious broodings."

"Yes," she said, with the naïveté of pain, too sorely troubled to fence any longer.

"I see," he answered; "you have sunk into the depths of indifference. If physical pain passes a certain point it extinguishes modesty, and so it is with mental anguish, it reaches a degree when the soul grows faint within us; I know."

Véronique was not prepared for this subtle observation and tender pity in M. Bonnet; but as has been seen already, the quick sympathies of a heart unjaded by emotion of its own had taught him to detect and feel the pain of others among his flock with the maternal instinct of a woman. This apostolic tenderness, this *mens divinior*, raises the priest above his fellowmen and makes of him a being divine. Mme. Graslin had not as yet looked deep enough into the curé's nature to discover the beauty hidden away in that soul, the source of its grace and freshness and its inner life.

"Ah! monsieur . . ." she began, and a glance and a gesture, such a gesture and glance as the dying give, put her secret into his keeping

"I understand!" he answered. "But what then? What is to be done?"

Silently they went along the terrace toward the plain. To the bearer of good tidings, the son of Christ, the solemn moment seemed propitious.

"Suppose that you stood now before the Throne of God," he said, and his voice grew low and mysterious, "what would you say to Him?"

Mme. Graslin stopped short as if thunderstruck; a light shudder ran through her.

"I should say to Him as Christ said, 'My Father, Thou hast forsaken me!' " she answered simply. The tones of her voice brought tears to the curé's eyes.

"Oh, Magdalen, those are the very words I was waiting to hear!" he exclaimed, unable to refuse his admiration. "You see, you appeal to God's justice! Listen, madame, Religion is the rule of God before the time. The Church reserves the right of judgment in all that concerns the soul. Man's justice is but the faint image of God's justice, a pale shadow of the eternal adapted to the temporal needs of society."

"What do you mean?"

"You are not judge in your own cause, you are amenable to God; you have no right to condemn nor to pardon yourself. God is the great Reviser of judgments, my daughter."

"Ah!" she cried.

"He *sees* to the origin of all things, while we only see the things themselves."

Again Véronique stopped. These ideas were new to her.

"To a soul as lofty as yours," he went on courageously, "I do not speak as to my poor parishioners; I owe it to you to use a different language. You who have so cultivated your mind can rise to the knowledge of the spirit of the Catholic religion, which words and symbols must express and make visible to the eyes of babes and the poor. Follow what I am about to say carefully, for it refers to you; and if the point of view which I take for the moment seems

wide, it is none the less your own case which I am considering.

"Justice, devised for the protection of society, is based upon a theory of the equality of individuals. Society, which is nothing but an aggregation of facts, is based on *inequality*. So there is a fundamental discrepancy between justice and fact. Should the law exercise a restraining or encouraging influence on the progress of society? In other words, should the law oppose itself to the internal tendency of society, so as to maintain things as they are; or, on the other hand, should the law be more flexible, adapt itself, and keep pace with the tendency so as to guide it? No maker of laws since men began to live together has taken it upon himself to decide that problem. All legislators have been content to analyze facts, to indicate those which seemed to them to be blameworthy or criminal, and to prescribe punishments or rewards. Such is law as man has made it. It is powerless to prevent evil-doing; powerless no less to prevent offenders who have been punished from offending again.

"Philanthropy is a sublime error. Philanthropy vainly applies severe discipline to the body, while it cannot find the balm which heals the soul. Philanthropy conceives projects, sets forth theories, and leaves mankind to carry them out by means of silence, work, and discipline—dumb methods, with no virtue in them. Religion knows naught of these imperfections; for her, life extends beyond this world; for Religion, we are all of us fallen creatures in a state of degradation, and it is this very view of mankind which opens out to us an inexhaustible treasure of indulgence. All of us are on the way to our complete regeneration, some of us are further advanced, and some less, but none of us are infallible; the Church is prepared for sins, ay, and even for crimes. In a criminal, society sees an individual to be cut off from its midst, but the Church sees in him a soul to be saved. And more, far more! . . . Inspired by God, whose dealings with man She watches and

ponders, the Church admits our inequality as human beings, and takes the disproportionate burden into account, and we who are so unequal in heart, in body or mind, in courage or aptitude, are made equal by repentance. In this, madame, equality is no empty word; we can be, and are, all equal through our sentiments.

"One idea runs through all religions, from the uncouth fetichism of the savage to the graceful imaginings of the Greek and the profound and ingenious doctrines of India and Egypt, an idea that finds expression in all cults joyous or gloomy, a conviction of man's fall and of his sin, whence, everywhere, the idea of sacrifice and redemption.

"The death of the Redeemer who died for the whole human race is for us a Symbol; this, too, we must do for ourselves; we must redeem our errors!—redeem our sins!—redeem our crimes! There is no sin beyond redemption—all Catholicism lies in that. It is the wherefore of the holy sacraments which assist in the work of grace and sustain the repentant sinner. And though one should weep, madame, and sigh like the Magdalen in the desert, this is but the beginning—an action is the end. The monasteries wept, but acted too; they prayed, but they civilized; they were the active practical spreaders of our divine religion. They built, and planted, and tilled Europe; they rescued the treasures of learning for us; to them we owe the preservation of our jurisprudence, our traditions of statecraft and art. The sites of those centres of light will be forever remembered in Europe with gratitude. Most modern towns sprang up about a monastery.

"If you believe that God is to judge you, the Church, using my voice, tells you that there is no sin beyond redemption through the good works of repentance. The evil we have wrought is weighed against the good that we have done by the great hands of God. Be yourself a monastery here; it is within your power to work miracles once more. For you, work must be prayer. Your work should be to diffuse happiness among those above whom you have been

set by your fortune and your intellect, and in all ways, even by your natural position, for the height of your chateau above the village is a visible expression of your social position."

They were turning toward the plains as he spoke, so that the curé could point out the village on the lower slopes of the hill and the chateau towering above it. It was half-past four in the afternoon. A shaft of yellow sunlight fell across the terrace and the gardens; it lighted up the chateau and brought out the pattern of the gleaming gilt scroll-work on the corner balconies high up on the towers; it lighted the plain which stretched into the distance divided by the road, a sober gray ribbon with no embroidery of trees as yet to outline a waving green border on either side. Véronique and M. Bonnet passed the end of the chateau and came into the courtyard, beyond which the stables and farm buildings lay in sight, and further yet the forest of Montégnac; the sunlight slid across the landscape like a lingering caress. Even when the last glow of the sunset had faded except from the highest hills, it was still light enough in the plain below to see all the chance effects of color in the splendid tapestry of an autumn forest spread between Montégnac and the first peak of the chain of the Corrèze. The oak trees stood out like masses of Florentine bronze among the verdigris greens of the walnuts and chestnuts; the leaves of a few trees, the first to change, shone like gold among the others; and all these different shades of color were emphasized by the gray patches of bare earth. The trunks of leafless trees looked like pale columns; and every tint, red, tawny, and gray, picturesquely blended in the pale October sunshine, made a harmony of color with the fertile lowland, where the vast fallows were green as stagnant water. Not a tree stirred, not a bird—death in the plain, silence in the forest; a thought in the priest's mind, as yet unuttered, was to be the sole comment on that dumb beauty. A streak of smoke rose here and there from the thatched roofs of the village. The chateau seemed

sombre as its mistress's mood, for there is a mysterious law of uniformity, in virtue of which the house takes its character from the dominant nature within it, a subtle presence which hovers throughout. The sense of the curé's words had reached Mme. Graslin's brain; they had gone to her heart with all the force of conviction; the angelic resonance of his voice had stirred her tenderness; she stopped suddenly short. The curé stretched his arm out toward the forest; Véronique looked at him.

"Do you not see a dim resemblance between this and the life of humanity? His own fate for each of us! And what unequal lots there are among that mass of trees. Those on the highest ground have poorer soil and less water; they are the first to die—"

"And some are *cut down in the grace of their youth by some woman* gathering wood!" she said bitterly.

"Do not give way to those feelings again," he answered firmly, but with indulgence in his manner. "The forest has not been cut down, and that has been its ruin. Do you see something yonder there among the dense forest?"

Véronique could scarcely distinguish between the usual and unusual in a forest, but she obediently looked in the required direction, and then timidly at the curé.

"Do you not observe," he said, seeing in that glance that Véronique did not understand, "that there are strips where all the trees of every kind are still green?"

"Oh, so there are!" she cried. "How is it?"

"In those strips of green lies a fortune for Montégnac and for you—a vast fortune, as I pointed out to M. Graslin. You can see three furrows; those are three valleys, the streams there are lost in the torrent-bed of the Gabou. The Gabou is the boundary line between us and the next commune. All through September and October it is dry, but when November comes it will be full. All that water runs to waste; but it would be easy to make one or two weirs across from side to side of the valley to keep back the water (as Riquet did at Saint-Ferréol, where there are huge reservoirs which sup-

ply the Languedoc canal); and it would be easy to increase the volume of the water by turning several little streams in the forest into the river. Wisely distributing it as required, by means of sluices and irrigation trenches, the whole plain can be brought into cultivation, and the overflow, besides, could be turned into our little river.

"You will have fine poplars along all the channels, and you will raise cattle in the finest possible meadows. What is grass but water and sun? You could grow corn in the plain, there is quite enough depth of earth; with so many trenches there will be moisture to enrich the soil; the poplar trees will flourish along the channels and attract the rain clouds, and the fields will absorb the principles of the rain: these are the secrets of the luxuriant greenness of the valleys. Some day you will see life and joy and stir instead of this prevailing silence and barren dreariness. Will not this be a noble prayer? Will not these things occupy your idleness better than melancholy broodings?"

Véronique grasped the curé's hand, and made but a brief answer, but that answer was grand—"It shall be done, monsieur."

"You have a conception of this great thing," he began again, "but you will not carry it out yourself. Neither you nor I have knowledge enough for the realization of a thought which might occur to any one, but that raises immense practical difficulties; for simple and almost invisible as those difficulties are, they call for the most accurate skill of science. So to-morrow begin your search for the human instruments which, in a dozen years' time, will contrive that the six thousand acres thus brought into cultivation shall yield you an income of six or seven thousand louis d'or. The undertaking will make Montégnac one of the richest communes in the department some day. The forest brings in nothing as yet; but sooner or later buyers will come here for the splendid timber, treasures slowly accumulated by time, the only treasures which man cannot procure save by patient waiting, and cannot do without. Perhaps some day (who

knows) the Government will take steps to open up ways of transporting timber grown here to its dockyards; but the Government will wait until Montégnac is ten times its present size before giving its fostering aid; for the Government, like Fortune, gives only to those who have. By that time this estate will be one of the finest in France; it will be the pride of your grandson, who may possibly find the chateau too small in proportion to his income."

"That is a future for me to live for," said Véronique.

"Such a work might redeem many errors," said the curé.

Seeing that he was understood, he endeavored to send a last shaft home by way of her intelligence; he had divined that in the woman before him the heart could only be reached through the brain; whereas, in other women, the way to the brain lies through the heart.

"Do you know what a great mistake you are making?" he asked, after a pause.

She looked at him with frightened eyes.

"Your repentance as yet is only the consciousness of a defeat. If there is anything fearful, it is the despair of Satan; and perhaps man's repentance was like this before Jesus Christ came on earth. But for us Catholics, repentance is the horror which seizes on a soul hurrying on its downward course, and in that shock God reveals Himself. You are like a Pagan Orestes; become a Saint Paul!"

"Your words have just wrought a complete change in me," she cried. "Now, oh! I want to live!"

"The spirit has overcome," the humble priest said to himself, as he went away, glad at heart. He had found food for the secret despair which was gnawing Mme. Graslin, by giving to her repentance the form of a good and noble deed.

The very next day, therefore, Véronique wrote to M. Grossetête, and in answer to her letter three saddle-horses arrived from Limoges for her in less than a week. M. Bonnet made inquiries, and sent the postmaster's son to the chateau; the young fellow, Maurice Champion by name, was only too pleased to put himself at Mme. Graslin's disposal,

with a chance of earning some fifty crowns. Véronique took a liking for the lad—round-faced, black-eyed, and black-haired, short, and well built—and he was at once installed as groom; he was to ride out with his mistress and to take charge of the horses.

The head forester at Montégnac was a native of Limoges, an old quartermaster in the Royal Guard. He had been transferred from another estate when the Duc de Navarreins began to think of selling the Montégnac lands, and wanted information to guide him in the matter; but in Montégnac forest Jerome Colorat only saw waste land, never likely to come under cultivation, timber valueless for lack of means of transport, gardens run wild, and a castle in ruins, calling for a vast outlay if it was to be set in order and made habitable. He saw wide rock-strewn spaces and conspicuous gray patches of granite even in the forest, and the honest but unintelligent servant took fright at these things. This was how the property had come into the market.

Mme. Graslin sent for this forester.

"Colorat," she said, "I shall most probably ride out tomorrow morning and every following day. You should know the different bits of outlying land which M. Graslin added to the estate, and you must point them out to me; I want to see everything for myself."

The servants at the chateau were delighted at this change in Véronique's life. Aline found out her mistress's old black riding habit, and mended it, without being told to do so, and next morning, with inexpressible pleasure, Mme. Sauviat saw her daughter dressed for a riding excursion. With Champion and the forester as her guides, Mme. Graslin set herself first of all to climb the heights. She wanted to understand the position of the slopes and the glens, the natural roadways cleft in the long ridge of the mountain. She would measure her task, study the course of the streams, and see the rough material of the curé's schemes. The forester and Champion were often obliged to consult their memories, for the mountain paths were scarcely visible in that wild

country. Colorat went in front, and Champion followed a few paces from her side.

So long as they kept to the denser forest, climbing and descending the continual undulations of a French mountain district, its wonders filled Véronique's mind. The mighty trees which had stood for centuries amazed her, until she saw so many that they ceased to be a surprise. Then others succeeded, full grown and ready for felling; or in a forest clearing some single pine risen to giant height; or, stranger still, some common shrub, a dwarf growth elsewhere, here risen, under some unusual conditions, to the height of a tree near as old as the soil in which it grew. The wreaths of mist rolling over the bare rocks filled her with indescribable feelings. Higher yet, pale furrows cut by the melting snows looked like scars far up on the mountain sides; there were bleak ravines in which no plant grew, hillside slopes where the soil had been washed away, leaving bare the rock clefts, where the hundred-year-old chestnuts grew straight and tall as pines in the Alps; sometimes they went by vast shifting sands, or boggy places where the trees are few; by fallen masses of granite, overhanging crags, dark glens, wide stretches of burned grass or moor, where the heather was still in bloom, arid and lonely spots where the caper grows and the juniper, through meadows covered with fine short grass, where the rich alluvial soil had been brought down and deposited century after century by the mountain torrents; in short, this rapid ride gave her something like a bird's-eye view of the land, a glimpse of the dreariness and grandeur, the strength and sweetness, of nature's wilder moods in the mountain country of midland France. And by dint of gazing at these pictures so various in form, but instinct with the same thought, the deep sadness expressed by the wild ruined land in its barrenness and neglect passed into her own thoughts, and found a response in her secret soul. As, through some gap in the woods, she looked down on the gray stretch of plain below, or when their way led up some parched ravine where a few stunted shrubs starved

among the bowlders and the sand, by sheer reiteration of the same sights she fell under the influence of this stern scenery; it called up new ideas in her mind, stirred to a sense of the significance underlying these outward and visible forms. There is no spot in a forest but has this inner sense, not a clearing, not a thicket, but has an analogy in the labyrinth of the human thought.

Who is there with a thinking brain or a wounded heart that can pass through a forest and find the forest dumb? Before you are aware its voice is in your ears, a soothing or an awful voice, but more often soothing than awful. And if you were to examine very closely into the causes of this sensation, this solemn, incomplex, subduing, and mysterious forest influence that comes over you, perhaps you will find its source in the sublime and subtle effect of the presence of so many creatures all obedient to their destinies, immovable in submission. Sooner or later the overwhelming sense of the abidingness of nature fills your heart and stirs deeper feelings, until at length you grow restless to find God in it. And so it was that with the silence of the mountain heights about her, out in the pure clear air with the forest scents in it, Véronique recovered, as she told M. Bonnet in the evening, the certainty of Divine mercy. She had glimpses of the possibility of an order of things above and beyond that in which her musings had hitherto revolved. She felt something like happiness. For a long time past she had not known such peace. Could it have been that she was conscious of a certain likeness between this country and the waste and dried-up places in her own soul? Did she look with a certain exultation on the troubles of nature with some thought that matter was punished here for no sin? Certain it is that her inner self was strongly stirred.

More than once Colorat and Champion looked at her, and then at each other, as if for them she were transfigured. One spot in particular that they reached in the steep bed of a dry torrent seemed to Véronique to be unspeakably arid. It was with a certain surprise that she found herself long-

ing to hear the sound of falling water in those scorching ravines.

"Always to love!" she thought. The words seemed like a reproach spoken aloud by a voice. In confusion she urged her horse blindly up toward the summit of the mountain of the Corrèze, and in spite of her guides dashed up to the top (called the Living Rock), and stood there alone. For several moments she scanned the whole country below her. She had heard the secret voices of so many existences asking to live, and now something took place within her that determined her to devote herself to this work with all the perseverance which she had already displayed to admiration. She tied her horse's bridle to a tree and sat down on a slab of rock. Her eyes wandered over the land where nature showed herself so harsh a step-dame, and felt within her own heart something of the mother's yearning which she had felt over her child. Her half-unconscious meditations, which, to use her own beautiful metaphor, "had sifted her heart," had prepared her to receive the sublime teaching of the scene that lay before her.

"It was then," she told the curé, "that I understood that our souls need to be tilled quite as much as the land."

The pale November sunlight shone over the wide landscape, but already a few gray clouds were gathering, driven across the sky by a cold west wind. It was now about three o'clock. Véronique had taken four hours to reach the point; but, as is the wont of those who are gnawed by profound inward misery, she gave no heed to anything without. At that moment her life shared the sublime movement of nature and dilated within her.

"Do not stay up there any longer, madame," said a man's voice, and something in its tone thrilled her. "You cannot reach home again in any direction if you do, for the nearest house lies a couple of leagues away, and it is impossible to find your way through the forest in the dark. And even those risks are nothing compared with the risk you are running where you are; in a few moments it will be deadly cold

on the peak; no one knows the why or wherefore, but it has been the death of many a one before now."

Mme. Graslin, looking down, saw a face almost black with sunburn, and two eyes that gleamed from it like tongues of fire. A shock of brown hair hung on either side of the face, and a long pointed beard wagged beneath it. The owner of the face respectfully raised one of the great broad-brimmed hats which the peasantry wear in the midland districts of France, and displayed a bald but magnificent brow, such as sometimes in a poor man compels the attention of passers-by. Véronique felt not the slightest fear; for a woman in such a position as hers, all the petty considerations which cause feminine tremors have ceased to exist.

"How did you come there?" she asked him.

"I live here, hard by," the stranger answered.

"And what do you do in this out-of-the-way place?" asked Véronique.

"I live in it."

"But how, and on what do you live?"

"They pay me a trifle for looking after this part of the forest," he said, pointing to the slopes of the peak opposite the plains of Montégnac. As he moved, Mme. Graslin caught sight of a game-bag and the muzzle of a gun, and any misgivings she might have entertained vanished forthwith.

"Are you a keeper?"

"No, madame. You can't be a keeper until you have been sworn, and you can't take the oath unless you have all your civic rights—"

"Then, who are you?"

"I am Farrabesche," said the man, in deep humility, with his eyes on the ground.

The name told Mme. Graslin nothing. She looked at the man before her. In an exceedingly kindly face there were signs of latent savagery; the uneven teeth gave an ironical turn, a suggestion of evil hardihood to the mouth and blood-red lips. In person he was of middle height, broad in the

shoulders, short in the neck, which was very full and deeply sunk. He had the large hairy hands characteristic of violent tempered people capable of abusing their physical advantages. His last words suggested some mystery, and his bearing, face, and figure all combined to give to that mystery a terrible interpretation.

"So you are in my employ?" Véronique said gently.

"Then have I the honor of speaking to Mme. Graslin?" asked Farrabesche.

"Yes, my friend," said she.

Farrabesche vanished with the speed of some wild creature after a frightened glance at his mistress. Véronique hastily mounted and went down to her two servants; the men were growing uneasy about her, for the inexplicable unwholesomeness of the Living Rock was well known in the country. Colorat begged her to go down a little valley into the plain. "It would be dangerous to return by the higher ground," he said; the tracks were hard to find, and crossed each other, and in spite of his knowledge of the country, he might lose himself.

Once in the plain, Véronique slackened the pace of her horse.

"Who is this Farrabesche whom you employ?" she asked, turning to the head forester.

"Did madame meet him?" exclaimed Colorat.

"Yes, but he ran away."

"Poor fellow! Perhaps he does not know how kind madame is."

"But, after all, what has he done?"

"Why, madame, Farrabesche is a murderer," Champion blurted out.

"Then, of course, he was pardoned, was he not?" Véronique asked in a tremulous voice.

"No, madame," Colorat answered. "Farrabesche was tried at the Assizes, and condemned to ten years' penal servitude; but he only did half his time, for they let him off the rest of the sentence; he came back from the hulks in

1827. He owes his life to M. le Curé, who persuaded him to give himself up. Judged by default, and sentenced to death, they would have caught him sooner or later, and he would have been in a bad way. M. Bonnet went out to look for him at the risk of his life. Nobody knows what he said to Farrabesche; they were alone for a couple of days; on the third he brought Farrabesche back to Tulle, and there he gave himself up. M. Bonnet went to see a clever lawyer, and got him to take up Farrabesche's case; and Farrabesche came off with ten years in jail. M. le Curé used to go to see him while he was in prison; and that fellow yonder, who was a terror to the whole countryside, grew as meek as any maid, and let them take him off to prison quietly. When he came out again, he settled down hereabout under M. le Curé's direction. People mind what they say to him; he always goes on Sundays and holidays to the services and to mass. He has a seat in the church along with the rest of us, but he always keeps by himself close to the wall. He takes the sacrament from time to time, but at the Communion table he keeps apart too."

"And this man has killed another man!"

"*One?*" asked Colorat; "he has killed a good many, he has! But he is not a bad sort for all that."

"Is it possible?" cried Véronique, and in her amazement she let the bridle fall on the horse's neck.

The head forester asked nothing better than to tell the tale.

"You see, madame," he said, "Farrabesche maybe was in the right at bottom. He was the last of the Farrabesches, an old family in the Corrèze; ay, yes! His eldest brother, Captain Farrabesche, was killed just ten years before in Italy, at Montenotte; only twenty-two he was, and a captain! That is what you might call bad luck, now, isn't it? And he had a little book-learning too; he could read and write, and he had made up his mind to be a general. They were sorry at home when he died, as well they might be, indeed! I was in the army with *The Other*[1] then; and I heard

[1] *L'Autre*, viz. Napoleon.

talk of his death. Oh! Captain Farrabesche fell gloriously; he saved the army, he did, and the Little Corporal! I was serving at that time under General Steingel, a German—that is to say, an Alsatian—a fine soldier he was, but shortsighted, and that was how he came by his end, some time after Captain Farrabesche. The youngest boy, that is the one yonder, was just six years old when he heard them talking about his big brother's death. The second brother went into the army too, but he went as a private soldier; and died a sergeant, first regiment of the Guard, a fine post, at the battle of Austerlitz, where, you see, madame, they manœuvred us all as smoothly as if it had been review day at the Tuileries. . . . I was there myself. Oh! I was lucky; I went through it all, and never came in for a single wound. . . . Well, then, our Farrabesche, the youngest, brave though he was, took it into his head that he would not go for a soldier. And 'tis a fact, the army did not suit that family. When the sous-prefet wanted him, in 1811, he took to the woods; a 'refractory conscript,' eh! that's what they used to call them. Thereupon a gang of chauffeurs got hold of him by fair means or foul, and he took to warming people's feet at last! You understand that no one except M. le Curé knows what he did along with those rascals, asking their pardon! Many a brush he had with the gendarmes, and the regular troops as well! First and last he has seen seven skirmishes."

"People say that he killed two soldiers and three gendarmes!" put in Champion.

"Who is to know how many?" Colorat answered. "He did not tell them. At last, madame, almost all the others were caught; but he, an active young fellow, knowing the country as he did, always got away. That gang of chauffeurs used to hang on the outskirts of Brives and Tulle, and they would often come over here to lie low, because Farrabesche knew places where they could hide easily. After 1814 nobody troubled about him any more, the conscription was abolished; but he had to spend the year 1815 in the woods.

As he could not sit down with his arms folded and live, he helped once more to stop a coach down below yonder in the ravine; but in the end he took M. le Curé's advice, and gave himself up. It was not easy to find witnesses; nobody dared give evidence against him. Then M. le Curé and his lawyer worked so hard for him that they let him off with ten years. He was lucky after being a chauffeur, for a chauffeur he was."

"But what is a chauffeur?"

"If you like, madame, I will just tell you the sort of thing they did, by all that I can make out from one and another, for you will understand that I was never a chauffeur myself. It was not nice, but necessity knows no law. It was like this: if they suspected some farmer or landowner of having money in his possession, seven or eight of them would drop in in the middle of the night, and they would light a fire and have supper there and then; when supper was over, if the master of the house would not give them as much money as they asked, they would tie his feet up to the pot-hook at the back of the fire, and would not let him go until they had what they asked for. That was all. They came in masks. With so many expeditions, there were a few mishaps. Lord! yes: there are obstinate folk and stingy people everywhere. There was a farmer once, old Cochegrue, a regular skinflint he was, he let them burn his feet; and, well, the man died of it. There was M. David's wife, too, not far from Brives; she died afterward of the fright they gave her, simply seeing them tie her husband's feet. 'Just give them what you have!' she said to him as she went. He would not, and she showed them the hiding-place. For five years the chauffeurs were the terror of the countryside; but get this well into your pate—I beg pardon, madame!—that more than one of them belonged to good families, and that sort of people are not the ones to let themselves be nabbed."

Mme. Graslin listened and made no reply. There was a moment's pause; then young Champion, eager to interest his mistress in his turn, was anxious to tell what he knew of Farrabesche.

"Madame ought to hear the whole truth of the matter. Farrabesche has not his match on horseback or afoot. He will fell an ox with a blow of his fist! He can carry seven hundred-weight, that he can! and there is not a better shot anywhere. When I was a little chap they used to tell me tales about Farrabesche. One day he and three of his comrades were surprised; they fought till one was killed and two were wounded; well and good, Farrabesche saw that he was caught; bah! he jumps on a gendarme's horse behind the man, claps spurs to the animal, which bolts off at a furious gallop and is out of sight, he gripping that gendarme round the waist all the time; he hugged the man so tight that after a while he managed to fling him off and ride single in the saddle, so he escaped and came by a horse. And he had the impudence to sell it directly afterward ten leagues on the other side of Limoges. He lay in hiding for three months after that exploit, and no one could find him. They offered a reward of a hundred louis to any one who would betray him."

"Another time," added Colorat, "as to those hundred louis put on his head by the prefect at Tulle, Farrabesche put a cousin of his in the way of earning it—Giriex it was, over at Vizay. His cousin denounced him, and seemed as if he meant to give him up. Oh! he actually gave him up; and very glad the gendarmes were to take him to Tulle. But he did not go far; they had to put him in the prison at Lubersac, and he got away the very first night, by way of a hole made by one of the gang, one Gabilleau, a deserter from the 17th, executed at Tulle, who was moved away the night before he expected to escape. A pretty character Farrabesche gained by these adventures. The troop had trusty friends, you know. And, besides, people liked the chauffeurs. Lord, they were quite different then from what they are nowadays, jolly fellows every one of them, that spent their money like princes. Just imagine it, madame; finds the gendarmes on his track one evening, does he? Well, he slipped through their fingers that time by lying twenty-

four hours in a pond in a farmyard, drawing his breath through a hole in the straw at the edge of a dung heap. What did a little discomfort like that matter to him when he had spent whole nights up among the little branches at the very top of a tree where a sparrow could hardly hold, watching the soldiers looking for him, passing and repassing below. Farrabesche was one of the five or six chauffeurs whom they never could catch; for as he was a fellow-countryman, and joined the gang perforce (for, after all, he only took to the woods to escape the conscription), all the women took his part, and that counts for much."

"So Farrabesche has really killed several men?" Mme. Graslin said again.

"Certainly," Colorat replied; "they even say that it was he who murdered the traveller in the coach in 1812; but the courier and postilion, the only witnesses who could have identified him, were dead when he came up for trial."

"And the robbery?" asked Mme. Graslin.

"Oh! They took all there was; but the five-and-twenty thousand francs which they found belonged to the Government."

For another league Mme. Graslin rode on in silence. The sun had set, and in the moonlight the gray plain looked like the open sea. Once or twice Champion and Colorat looked at Mme. Graslin, for her silence made them uneasy, and both were greatly disturbed to see that her eyes were red with much weeping and full of tears, which fell drop by drop and glittered on her cheeks.

"Oh! don't be sorry for him, madame," said Colorat. "The fellow led a jolly life, and has had pretty sweethearts. And if the police keep an eye on him now, he is protected by M. le Curé's esteem and friendship; for he repented, and in the convicts' prison he behaved in the most exemplary way. Everybody knows that he is as good as the best among us; only he is so proud, he has no mind to lay himself open to any slight, but he lives peaceably and does good after his fashion. Over the other side of the

Living Rock he has ten acres or so of young saplings of his own planting; and when he sees a place for a tree in the forest, he will stick one of them in. Then he lops off the dead branches, and collects the wood, and does it up in fagots ready for poor people. And the poor people, knowing that they can have firewood all ready for the asking, go to him instead of helping themselves and damaging your woods. So if he still 'warms people's feet,' as you may say, it does them good now. Farrabesche is fond of your forest; he looks after it as if it were his own."

"And yet he lives! . . . quite alone." Mme. Graslin hastily added the last two words.

"Asking your pardon, madame, no. He is bringing up a little lad; going fifteen now he is," said Maurice Champion.

"Faith, yes, that he is," Colorat remarked, "for La Curieux had that child a good while before Farrabesche gave himself up."

"Is it his son?" asked Mme. Graslin.

"Well, every one thinks so."

"And why did he not marry the girl?"

"Why? Because they would have caught him! And besides, when La Curieux knew that he was condemned, she left the neighborhood, poor thing."

"Was she pretty?"

"Oh, my mother says that she was very much like—dear me! another girl who left the place too—very much like Denise Tascheron."

"Was he loved?" asked Mme. Graslin.

"Bah! yes, because he was a *chauffeur!*" said Colorat. "The women always fall in love with anything out of the way. But for all that, nothing astonished people hereabout so much as this love affair. Catherine Curieux was a good girl who lived like a virgin saint; she was looked on as a paragon of virtue in her neighborhood over at Vizay, a large village in the Corrèze, on the boundary of two departments. Her father and mother were tenants

of M. Brézac's. Catherine Curieux was quite seventeen years old at the time of Farrabesche's sentence. The Farrabesches were an old family out of the same district, but they settled on the Montégnac lands; they had the largest farm in the village. Farrabesche's father and mother are dead now, and La Curieux's three sisters are married; one lives at Aubusson, one at Limoges, and one at Saint-Léonard."

"Do you think that Farrabesche knows where Catherine is?" asked Mme. Graslin.

"If he knew, he would break his bounds. Oh! he would go to her. . . . As soon as he came back he asked her father and mother (through M. Bonnet) for the child. La Curieux's father and mother were taking care of the child; M. Bonnet persuaded them to give him up to Farrabesche."

"Does nobody know what became of her?"

"Bah!" said Colorat. "The lass thought herself ruined, she was afraid to stop in the place! She went to Paris. What does she do there? That is the rub. As for looking for her in Paris, you might as well try to find a marble among the flints there in the plain."

Colorat pointed to the plain of Montégnac as he spoke. By this time Mme. Graslin was only a few paces from the great gateway of the chateau. Mme. Sauviat, in anxiety, was waiting there for her with Aline and the servants; they did not know what to think of so long an absence.

"Well," said Mme. Sauviat, as she helped her daughter to dismount, "you must be horribly tired."

"No, dear mother," Mme. Graslin answered, in an unsteady voice, and Mme. Sauviat, looking at her daughter, saw that she had been weeping for a long time.

Mme. Graslin went into the house with Aline, her confidential servant, and shut herself into her room. She would not see her mother; and when Mme. Sauviat tried to enter, Aline met the old Auvergnate with "Madame is asleep."

The next morning Véronique set out on horseback, with Maurice as her sole guide. She took the way by which they had returned the evening before, so as to reach the Living Rock as quickly as might be. As they climbed up the ravine which separates the last ridge in the forest from the actual summit of the mountain (for the Living Rock, seen from the plain, seems to stand alone), Véronique bade Maurice show her the way to Farrabesche's cabin and wait with the horses until she came back. She meant to go alone. Maurice went with her as far as a pathway which turned off toward the opposite side of the Living Rock, furthest from the plain, and pointed out the thatched roof of a cottage half hidden on the mountain side; below it lay the nursery-ground of which Colorat had spoken.

It was almost noon. A thin streak of smoke rising from the cottage chimney guided Véronique, who soon reached the place, but would not show herself at first. At the sight of the little dwelling, and the garden about it, with its fence of dead thorns, she stood for a few moments lost in thoughts known to her alone. Several acres of grass land, inclosed by a quickset hedge, wound away beyond the garden; the low spreading branches of apple and pear and plum trees were visible here and there in the field. Above the house, on the sandier soil of the high mountain slopes, there rose a splendid grove of tall chestnut trees, their topmost leaves turned yellow and sear.

Mme. Graslin pushed open the crazy wicket which did duty as a gate, and saw before her the shed, the little yard, and all the picturesque and living details of the dwellings of the poor. Something surely of the grace of the open fields hovers about them. Who is there that is not moved by the revelation of lowly, almost vegetative lives—the clothes drying on the hedge, the rope of onions hanging from the roof, the iron cooking pots set out in the sun, the wooden bench hidden among the honeysuckle leaves, the houseleeks that grow on the ridges of almost every thatched hovel in France?

Véronique found it impossible to appear unannounced in her keeper's cottage, for two fine hunting-dogs began to bark as soon as they heard the rustle of her riding-habit on the dead leaves; she gathered up her skirts on her arm, and went toward the house. Farrabesche and the boy were sitting on a wooden bench outside. Both rose to their feet and uncovered respectfully, but without a trace of servility.

"I have been told that you are seeing after my interests," said Véronique, with her eyes fixed on the lad; "so I determined to see your cottage and nursery of saplings for myself, and to ask you about some improvements."

"I am at your service, madame," replied Farrabesche.

Véronique was admiring the lad. It was a charming face; somewhat sunburned and brown, but in shape a faultless oval; the outlines of the forehead were delicately fine, the orange-colored eyes exceedingly bright and alert; the long dark hair, parted on the forehead, fell upon either side of the brow. Taller than most boys of his age, he was very nearly five feet high. His trousers were of the same coarse brown linen as his shirt; he wore a threadbare waistcoat of rough blue cloth with horn buttons, a short jacket of the material facetiously described as "Maurienne velvet," in which Savoyards are wont to dress, and a pair of iron-bound shoes on his otherwise bare feet to complete the costume. His father was dressed in the same fashion; but instead of the little lad's brown woollen cap, Farrabesche wore the wide-brimmed peasant's hat. In spite of its quick intelligence, the child's face wore the look of gravity (evidently unforced) peculiar to young creatures brought up in solitude; he must have put himself in harmony with the silence and the life of the forest. Indeed, in both Farrabesche and his son the physical side of their natures seemed to be the most highly developed; they possessed the peculiar faculties of the savage—the keen sight, the alertness, the complete mastery of the body as an instrument, the quick hearing, the signs of activity and intelligent skill. No sooner did the boy's eyes turn to his father than Mme.

Graslin divined that here was the limitless affection in which the prompting of natural instinct and deliberate thought were confirmed by the most effectual happiness.

"Is this the child of whom I have heard?" asked Véronique, indicating the lad.

"Yes, madame."

Véronique signed to Farrabesche to come a few paces away. "But have you taken no steps toward finding his mother?" she asked.

"Madame does not know, of course, that I am not allowed to go beyond the bounds of the commune where I am living—"

"And have you never heard of her?"

"When my time was out," he said, "the commissary paid over to me the sum of a thousand francs, which had been sent me, a little at a time, every quarter; the rules would not allow me to have it until I came out. I thought that no one but Catherine would have thought of me, as it was not M. Bonnet who sent it; so I am keeping the money for Benjamin."

"And how about Catherine's relations?"

"They thought no more about her after she went away. Besides, they did their part by looking after the child."

Véronique turned to go toward the house.

"Very well, Farrabesche," she said; "I will have inquiry made, so as to make sure that Catherine is still living, and where she is, and what kind of life she is leading—"

"Madame, whatever she may be, I shall look upon it as good fortune to have her for my wife," the man cried in a softened tone. "It is for her to show reluctance, not for me. Our marriage will legitimate the poor boy, who has no suspicion yet of how he stands."

The look in the father's eyes told the tale of the life these two outcasts led in their voluntary exile; they were all in all to each other, like two fellow-countrymen in the midst of a desert.

"So you love Catherine?" asked Véronique.

"It is not so much that I love her, madame," he an-

swered, "as that, placed as I am, she is the one woman in the world for me."

Mme. Graslin turned swiftly, and went as far as the chestnut trees, as if some pang had shot through her. The keeper thought that this was some whim of hers, and did not venture to follow. For nearly a quarter of an hour she sat, apparently engaged in looking out over the landscape. She could see all that part of the forest which lay along the side of the valley, with the torrent in the bottom; it was dry now, and full of bowlders, a sort of huge ditch shut in between the forest-covered mountains above Montégnac and another parallel range, these last hills being steep though low, and so bare that there was scarcely so much as a starveling tree here and there to crown the slopes, where a few rather melancholy-looking birches, juniper bushes, and briars were trying to grow. This second range belonged to a neighboring estate, and lay in the department of the Corrèze; indeed, the crossroad which meanders along the winding valley is the boundary line of the arrondissement of Montégnac, and also of the two estates. The opposite side of the valley beyond the torrent was quite unsheltered and barren enough. It was a sort of long wall with a slope of fine woodland behind it, and a complete contrast in its bleakness to the side of the mountain on which Farrabesche's cottage stood. Gnarled and twisted forms on the one side, and on the other shapely growths and delicate curving lines; on the one side the dreary, unchanging silence of a sloping desert, held in place by blocks of stone and bare, denuded rocks, and on the other, the contrasts of green among the trees. Many of them were leafless now, but the fine variegated tree trunks stood up straight and tall on each ledge, and the branches waved as the wind stirred through them. A few of them, the oaks, elms, beeches, and chestnuts which held out longer against the autumn than the rest, still retained their leaves —golden, or bronze, or purple.

In the direction of Montégnac the valley opens out so

widely that the two sides describe a vast horseshoe. Véronique, with her back against a chestnut tree, could see glen after glen arranged like the stages of an amphitheatre, the topmost crests of the trees rising one above the other in rows like the heads of spectators. On the other side of the ridge lay her own park, in which, at a later time, this beautiful hillside was included. Near Farrabesche's cottage the valley grew narrower and narrower, till it closed in as a gully scarce a hundred feet across.

The beauty of the view over which Mme. Graslin's eyes wandered, heedlessly at first, soon recalled her to herself. She went back to the cottage, where the father and son were standing in silence, making no attempt to explain the strange departure of their mistress. Véronique looked at the house. It was more solidly built than the thatched roof had led her to suppose; doubtless it had been left to go to ruin at the time when the Navarreins ceased to trouble themselves about the estate. No sport, no gamekeepers. But though no one had lived in it for a century, the walls held good in spite of the ivy and climbing plants which clung about them on every side. Farrabesche himself had thatched the roof when he received permission to live there; he had laid the stone flags on the floor, and brought in such furniture as there was.

Véronique went inside the cottage. Two beds, such as the peasants use, met her eyes; there was a large cupboard of walnut wood, a hutch for bread, a dresser, a table, three chairs, a few brown earthen platters on the shelves of the dresser; in fact, all the necessary household gear. A couple of guns and a game-bag hung above the mantel-shelf. It went to Véronique's heart to see how many things the father had made for the little one; there was a toy man-of-war, a fishing smack, and a carved wooden cup, a chest wonderfully ornamented, a little box decorated with mosaic work in straw, a beautifully-wrought crucifix and rosary. The rosary was made of plum-stones; on each a head had been carved with wonderful skill—Jesus Christ, the Apostles, the Madonna, St. John the Baptist, St. Anne, the two Magdalens.

"I did it to amuse the child during the long winter evenings," he said, with something of apology in his tone.

Jessamine and climbing roses covered the front of the house, and broke into blossom about the upper windows. Farrabesche used the first floor as a storeroom; he kept poultry, ducks, and a couple of pigs, and bought nothing but bread, salt, sugar, and such groceries as they needed. Neither he nor the lad drank wine.

"Everything that I have seen and heard of you," Mme. Graslin said at last, turning to Farrabesche, "has led me to take an interest in you which shall not come to nothing."

"This is M. Bonnet's doing, I know right well!" cried Farrabesche with touching fervor.

"You are mistaken; M. le Curé has said nothing to me of you as yet; chance or God, it may be, has brought it all about."

"Yes, madame, it is God's doing; God alone can work wonders for such a wretch as I."

"If your life has been a wretched one," said Mme. Graslin, in tones so low that they did not reach the boy (a piece of womanly feeling which touched Farrabesche), "your repentance, your conduct, and M. Bonnet's good opinion should go far to retrieve it. I have given orders that the buildings on the large farm near the chateau which M. Graslin planned are to be finished; you shall be my steward there; you will find scope for your energies and employment for your son. The public prosecutor at Limoges shall be informed of your case, and I will engage that the humiliating restrictions which make your life a burden to you shall be removed."

Farrabesche dropped down on his knees as if thunderstruck at the words which opened out a prospect of the realization of hopes hitherto cherished in vain. He kissed the hem of Mme. Graslin's riding habit; he kissed her feet. Benjamin saw the tears in his father's eyes, and began to sob without knowing why.

"Do not kneel, Farrabesche," said Mme. Graslin; "you

do not know how natural it is that I should do for you these things that I have promised to do. . . . Did you not plant those trees," she added, pointing to one or two pitch-pines, Norway pines, firs and larches at the base of the arid, thirsty hillside opposite.

"Yes, madame."

"Then is the soil better just there?"

"The water is always wearing the rocks away, so there is a little light soil washed down on to your land, and I took advantage of it, for all the valley down below the road belongs to you; the road is the boundary line."

"Then does a good deal of water flow down the length of the valley?"

"Oh! in a few days, madame, if the weather sets in rainy, you will maybe hear the roaring of the torrent over at the chateau! but even then it is nothing compared with what it will be when the snow melts. All the water from the whole mountain side there at the back of your park and gardens flows into it; in fact, all the streams hereabout flow down to the torrent, and the water comes down like a deluge. Luckily for you, the tree roots on your side of the valley bind the soil together, and the water slips off the leaves, for the fallen leaves here in autumn are like an oilcloth cover for the land, or it would all be washed down into the valley bottom, and the bed of the torrent is so steep that I doubt whether the soil would stop there."

"What becomes of all the water?" asked Mme. Graslin.

Farrabesche pointed to the gully which seemed to shut in the valley below his cottage.

"It pours out over a chalky bit of level ground that separates Limousin from the Corrèze, and there it lies for several months in stagnant green pools, sinking slowly down into the soil. That is how the common came to be so unhealthy that no one lives there, and nothing can be done with it. No kind of cattle will pasture on the reeds and rushes in those brackish pools. Perhaps there are three thousand acres of it altogether; it is the common land of three parishes; but

it is just like the plain of Montégnac, you can do nothing with it. And down in your plain there is a certain amount of sand and a little soil among the flints, but here there is nothing but the bare tufa."

"Send for the horses; I mean to see all this for myself."

Mme. Graslin told Benjamin where she had left Maurice, and the lad went forthwith.

"They tell me that you know every yard of this country," Mme. Graslin continued; "can you explain to me how it happens that no water flows into the plain of Montégnac from my side of the ridge? There is not the smallest torrent there even in rainy weather or in the time of the melting of the snows."

"Ah! madame," Farrabesche answered, "M. le Curé, who is always thinking of the prosperity of Montégnac, guessed the cause, but had not proof of it. Since you came here, he told me to mark the course of every runnel in every little valley. I had been looking at the lay of the land yesterday, and was on my way back when I had the honor of meeting you at the base of the Living Rock. I heard the sound of horse hoofs, and I wanted to know who was passing this way. Madame, M. Bonnet is not only a saint, he is a man of science. 'Farrabesche,' said he (I being at work at the time on the road which the commune finished up to the chateau for you)—'Farrabesche, if no water from this side of the hill reaches the plain below, it must be because nature has some sort of drainage arrangement for carrying it off elsewhere.'—Well, madame, the remark is so simple that it looks downright trite, as if any child might have made it. But nobody since Montégnac was Montégnac, neither great lords, nor stewards, nor keepers, nor rich, nor poor, though the plain lay there before their eyes with nothing growing on it for want of water, not one of them ever thought of asking what became of the water in the Gabou. The stagnant water gives them the fever in three communes, but they never thought of looking for the remedy: and I myself never dreamed of it; it took a man of God to see that—"

Farrabesche's eyes filled with tears as he spoke.

"The discoveries of men of genius are all so simple that every one thinks he could have found them out," said Mme. Graslin; and to herself she added, "But there is this grand thing about genius, that while it is akin to all others, no one resembles it."

"At once I saw what M. Bonnet meant," Farrabesche went on. "He had not to use a lot of long words to explain my job to me. To make the thing all the queerer, madame, all the ridge above your plain (for it all belongs to you) is full of pretty deep cracks, ravines, and gullies, and what not; but all the water that flows down all the valleys, clefts, ravines, and gorges, every channel, in fact, empties itself into a little valley a few feet lower than the level of your plain, madame. I know the cause of this state of things to-day, and here it is: There is a sort of embankment of rock (*schist*, M. Bonnet calls it) twenty to thirty feet thick, which runs in an unbroken line all round the bases of the hills between Montégnac and the Living Rock. The earth, being softer than the stone, has been worn away and been hollowed out; so, naturally, the water all flows round into the Gabou, eating its passage out of each valley. The trees and thickets and brushwood hide the lay of the land; but when you follow the streams and track their passage, it is easy to convince yourself of the facts. In this way both hillsides drain into the Gabou, all the water from this side that we see, and the other over the ridge where your park lies, as well as from the rocks opposite. M. le Curé thinks that this state of things would work its own cure when the water-courses on your side of the ridge are blocked up at the mouth by the rocks and soil washed down from above, so that they raise barriers between themselves and the Gabou. When that times comes your plain will be flooded in turn like the common land you are just about to see; but it would take hundreds of years to bring that about. And besides, is it a thing to wish for, madame? Suppose that your plain of Montégnac should not suck up all that water, like the common land

here, there would be some more standing pools there to poison the whole country."

"So the places M. le Curé pointed out to me a few days ago, where the trees are still green, must mark the natural channels through which the water flows down into the Gabou?"

"Yes, madame. There are three hills between the Living Rock and Montégnac, and consequently there are three water courses, and the streams that flow down them, banked in by the schist barrier, turn to the Gabou. That belt of wood still green, round the base of the hills, looks as if it were part of your plain, but it marks the course of the channel which was there, as M. le Curé guessed it would be."

"The misfortune will soon turn to a blessing for Montégnac," said Mme. Graslin, with deep conviction in her tones. "And since you have been the first instrument, you shall share in the work; you shall find active and willing workers, for hard work and perseverance must make up for the money which we lack."

Mme. Graslin had scarcely finished the sentence when Benjamin and Maurice came up; she caught at her horse's bridle, and, by a gesture, bade Farrabesche mount Maurice's horse.

"Now bring me to the place where the water drowns the common land," she said.

"It will be so much the better that you should go, madame, since that the late M. Graslin, acting on M. Bonnet's advice, bought about three hundred acres of land at the mouth of the gully where the mud has been deposited by the torrent, so that over a certain area there is some depth of rich soil. Madame will see the other side of the Living Rock; there is some magnificent timber there, and doubtless M. Graslin would have had a farm on the spot. The best situation would be a place where the little stream that rises near my house sinks into the ground again; it might be turned to advantage."

Farrabesche led the way, and Véronique followed down

a steep path toward a spot where the two sides of the gully drew in, and then separated sharply to east and west, as if divided by some earthquake shock. The gully was about sixty feet across. Tall grasses were growing among the huge bowlders in the bottom. On the one side the Living Rock, cut to the quick, stood up a solid surface of granite without the slightest flaw in it; but the height of the uncompromising rock wall was crowned with the overhanging roots of trees, for the pines clutched the soil with their branching roots, seeming to grasp the granite as a bird clings to a bough; but on the other side the rock was yellow and sandy, and hollowed out by the weather; there was no depth in the caverns, no boldness in the hollows of the soft crumbling ochre-tinted rock. A few prickly-leaved plants, burdocks, reeds, and water-plants at its base were sufficient signs of a north aspect and poor soil. Evidently the two ranges, though parallel, and as it were blended at the time of the great cataclysm which changed the surface of the globe, were composed of entirely different materials—an inexplicable freak of nature, or the result of some unknown cause which waits for genius to discover it. In this place the contrast between them was most strikingly apparent.

Véronique saw in front of her a vast dry plateau. There was no sign of plant-life anywhere; the chalky soil explained the infiltration of the water, only a few stagnant pools remained here and there where the surface was incrusted. To the right stretched the mountains of the Corrèze, and to the left the eye was arrested by the huge mass of the Living Rock, the tall forest trees that clothed its sides, and two hundred acres of grass below the forest, in strong contrast with the ghastly solitude about them.

"My son and I made the ditch that you see down yonder," said Farrabesche; "you can see it by the line of tall grass; it will be connected shortly with the ditch that marks the edge of your forest. Your property is bounded on this side by a desert, for the first village lies a league away."

Véronique galloped into the hideous plain, and her keeper

followed. She cleared the ditch and rode at full speed across the dreary waste, seeming to take a kind of wild delight in the vast picture of desolation before her. Farrabesche was right. No skill, no human power could turn that soil to account, the ground rang hollow beneath the horses' hoofs. This was a result of the porous nature of the tufa, but there were cracks and fissures no less through which the flood water sank out of sight, doubtless to feed some far-off springs.

"And yet there are souls like this!" Véronique exclaimed within herself as she reined in her horse, after a quarter of an hour's gallop.

She mused a while with the desert all about her; there was no living creature, no animal, no insect; birds never crossed the plateau. In the plain of Montégnac there were at any rate the flints, a little sandy or clayey soil, and crumbled rock to make a thin crust of earth a few inches deep as a beginning for cultivation; but here the ungrateful tufa which had ceased to be earth, and had not become stone, wearied the eyes so cruelly that they were absolutely forced to turn for relief to the illimitable ether of space. Véronique looked along the boundary of her forests and at the meadow which her husband had added to the estate, then she went slowly back toward the mouth of the Gabou. She came suddenly upon Farrabesche, and found him looking into a hole, which might have suggested that some one of a speculative turn had been probing this unlikely spot, imagining that nature had hidden some treasure there.

"What is it?" asked Véronique, noticing the deep sadness of the expression on the manly face.

"Madame, I owe my life to this trench here, or, more properly, I owe to it a space for repentance and time to redeem my faults in the eyes of men—"

The effect of this explanation of life was to na.' Mme. Graslin to the spot. She reined in her horse.

"I used to hide here, madame. The ground is so full of echoes, that if I laid my ear to the earth I could catch the sound of the horses of the gendarmerie or the tramp of sol-

diers (an unmistakable sound that!) more than a league away. Then I used to escape by way of the Gabou. I had a horse ready in a place there, and I always put five or six leagues between myself and them that were after me. Catherine used to bring me food of a night. If she did not find any sign of me, I always found bread and wine left in a hole covered over by a stone."

These recollections of his wild vagrant life, possibly unwholesome recollections for Farrabesche, stirred Véronique's most indulgent pity, but she rode rapidly on toward the Gabou, followed by the keeper. While she scanned the gap, looking down the long valley, so fertile on one side, so forlorn on the other, and saw, more than a league away, the hillside ridges, tier on tier, at the back of Montégnac, Farrabesche said, "There will be famous waterfalls here in a few days."

"And by the same day next year, not a drop of water will ever pass that way again. I am on my own property on either side, so I shall build a wall solid enough and high enough to keep the water in. Instead of a valley which is doing nothing, I shall have a lake, twenty, thirty, forty, or fifty feet deep, and about a league across—a vast reservoir for the irrigation channels that shall fertilize the whole plain of Montégnac."

"M. le Curé was right, madame, when he told us, as we were finishing your road, that we were working for our mother; may God give His blessing to such an enterprise."

"Say nothing about it, Farrabesche," said Mme. Graslin; "it is M. Bonnet's idea."

Véronique returned to Farrabesche's cottage, found Maurice, and went back at once to the chateau. Her mother and Aline were surprised at the change in her face; the hope of doing good to the country had given it a look of something like happiness. Mme. Graslin wrote to M. Grossetete; she wanted him to ask M. de Granville for complete liberty for the poor convict, giving particulars as to his good conduct, which was further vouched for by the mayor's certificate

and a letter from M. Bonnet. She also sent other particulars concerning Catherine Curieux, and entreated Grossetete to interest the public prosecutor in her kindly project, and to cause a letter to be written to the prefecture of police in Paris with a view to discovering the girl. The mere fact that Catherine had remitted sums of money to the convict in prison should be a sufficient clew by which to trace her. Véronique had set her heart on knowing the reason why Catherine had failed to come back to her child and to Farrabesche. Then she told her old friend of her discoveries in the torrent-bed of the Gabou, and laid stress on the necessity of finding the clever man for whom she had already asked him.

The next day was Sunday. For the first time since Véronique took up her abode in Montégnac, she felt able to go to church for mass. She went and took possession of her pew in the Lady Chapel. Looking round her, she saw how bare the poverty-stricken church was, and determined to set by a certain sum every year for repairs and the decoration of the altars. She heard the words of the priest, tender, gracious and divine; for the sermon, couched in such simple language that all present could understand it, was in truth sublime. The sublime comes from the heart; it is not to be found by effort of the intellect; and religion is an inexhaustible source of sublime thoughts with no false glitter of brilliance, for the catholicism which penetrates and changes hearts is wholly of the heart. M. Bonnet found in the epistle a text for his sermon, to the effect that soon or late God fulfils His promises, watches over His own, and encourages the good. He made it clear that great things would be the result of the presence of a rich and charitable resident in the parish, by pointing out that the duties of the poor toward the beneficent rich were as extensive as those of the rich toward the poor, and that the relation should be one of mutual help.

Farrabesche had spoken to some of those who were glad to see him (one consequence of the spirit of Christian charity

which M. Bonnet had infused into practical action in his parish), and had told them of Mme. Graslin's kindness to him. All the commune had talked this over in the square below the church, where, according to country custom, they gathered together before mass. Nothing could more completely have won the goodwill of these folk, who are so readily touched by any kindness shown to them; and when Véronique came out of church, she found almost all the parish standing in a double row. All hats went off respectfully and in deep silence as she passed. This welcome touched her, though she did not know the real reason of it. Among the last of all she saw Farrabesche, and spoke to him.

"You are a good sportsman; do not forget to send us some game."

A few days after this Véronique walked with the curé in that part of the forest nearest her chateau; she determined to descend the ridges which she had seen from the Living Rock, ranged tier on tier on the other side of the hill. With the curé's assistance, she would ascertain the exact position of the higher affluents of the Gabou. The result was the discovery by the curé of the fact that the streams which water Upper Montégnac really rose in the mountains of the Corrèze. These ranges were united to the mountain by the arid rib of hill which ran parallel to the chain of the Living Rock. The curé came back from that walk with boyish glee; he saw, with the *naïveté* of a poet, the prosperity of the village that he loved. And what is a poet but a man who realizes his dreams before the time? M. Bonnet reaped his harvests as he looked down from the terrace at the barren plain.

Farrabesche and his son came up to the chateau next morning loaded with game. The keeper had brought a cup for Francis Graslin; it was nothing less than a masterpiece —a battle scene carved on a cocoanut shell. Mme. Graslin happened to be walking on the terrace, on the side that overlooked "Tascherons'." She sat down on a garden seat and looked long at that fairy's work. Tears came into her eyes from time to time.

"You must have been very unhappy," she said, addressing Farrabesche after a silence.

"What could I do, madame?" he answered. "I was there without the hope of escape, which makes life bearable to almost all the convicts—"

"It is an appalling life!" she said, and her look and compassionate tones invited Farrabesche to speak.

In Mme. Graslin's convulsive tremor and evident emotion Farrabesche saw nothing but the overwrought interest excited by pitying curiosity. Just at that moment Mme. Sauviat appeared in one of the garden walks, and seemed about to join them, but Véronique drew out her handkerchief and motioned her away. "Let me be, mother," she cried, in sharper tones than she had ever before used to the old Auvergnate.

"For five years I wore a chain riveted here to a heavy iron ring, madame," Farrabesche said, pointing to his leg. "I was fastened to another man. I have had to live like that with three convicts first and last. I used to lie on a wooden camp bedstead, and I had to work uncommonly hard to get a thin mattress, called a *serpentin*. There were eight hundred men in each ward. Each of the beds (*tolards*, they called them) held twenty-four men, all chained together two and two, and nights and mornings they passed a long chain called the 'bilboes string,' in and out of the chains that bound each couple together, and made it fast to the *tolard*, so that all of us were fastened down by the feet. Even after a couple of years of it, I could not get used to the clank of those chains; every moment they said, 'You are in a convicts' prison!' If you dropped off to sleep for a minute, some rogue or other would begin to wrangle or turn himself round, and put you in mind of your plight. You had to serve an apprenticeship to learn how to sleep. I could not sleep at all, in fact, unless I was utterly exhausted with a heavy day's work.

"After I managed to sleep, I had, at any rate, the night when I could forget things. Forgetfulness—that is some-

thing, madame! Once a man is there, he must learn to satisfy his needs after a manner fixed by the most pitiless rules. You can judge, madame, what sort of effect this life was like to have on me, a young fellow who had always lived in the woods, like the wild goats and the birds! Ah! if I had not eaten my bread cooped up in the four walls of a prison for six months beforehand, I should have thrown myself into the sea at the sight of my mates, for all the beautiful things M. Bonnet said, and (I may say it) he has been the father of my soul. I did pretty well in the open air; but when once I was shut up in the ward to sleep or eat (for we ate our food there out of troughs, three couples to each trough), it took all the life out of me; the dreadful faces and the language of the others always sickened me. Luckily, at five o'clock in the summer, and half-past seven in winter, out we went in spite of heat or cold or wind or rain, in the 'jail gang'—that means to work. So we were out of doors most of our time, and the open air seems very good to you when you come out of a place where eight hundred convicts herd together. . . . The air, you must always remember, is sea air! You enjoy the breeze, the sun is like a friend, and you watch the clouds pass over, and look for hopeful signs of a beautiful day. For my own part, I took an interest in my work."

Farrabesche stopped, for two great tears rolled down Véronique's cheeks.

"Oh! madame, these are only the roses of that existence!" he cried, taking the expression on Mme. Graslin's face for pity of his lot. "There are the dreadful precautions the Government takes to make sure of us, the inquisition kept up by the warders, the inspection of fetters morning and evening, the coarse food, the hideous clothes that humiliate you at every moment, the constrained position while you sleep, the frightful sound of four hundred double chains clanking in an echoing ward, the prospect of being mowed down with grape-shot if half-a-dozen scoundrels take it into their heads to rebel—all these horrible things are nothing, they are the roses of that life, as I said before.

Any respectable man unlucky enough to be sent there must die of disgust before very long. You have to live day and night with another convict; you have to endure the company of five more at every meal, and twenty-three at night; you have to listen to their talk.

"The convicts have secret laws among themselves, madame; if you make an outlaw of yourself, they will murder you; if you submit, you become a murderer. You have your choice—you must be either victim or executioner. After all, if you die at a blow, that would put an end to you and your troubles; but they are too cunning in wickedness, it is impossible to hold out against their hatred: any one whom they dislike is completely at their mercy, they can make every moment of his life one constant torture worse than death. Any man who repents and tries to behave well is the common enemy, and more particularly they suspect him of tale-telling. They will take a man's life on a mere suspicion of tale-telling. Every ward has its tribunal, where they try crimes against the convicts' laws. It is an offence not to conform to their customs, and a man may be punished for that. For instance, everybody is bound to help the escape of a convict; every convict has his chance of escape in turn, when the whole prison is bound to give him help and protection. It is a crime to reveal anything done by a convict to further his escape. I will not speak of the horrible moral tone of the prison; strictly speaking, it has nothing to do with the subject. The prison authorities chain men of opposite dispositions together, so as to neutralize any attempt at escape or rebellion; and always put those who either could not endure each other, or were suspicious of each other, on the same chain."

"What did you do?" asked Mme. Graslin.

"Oh! it was like this, I had luck," said Farrabesche; "the lot never fell to me to kill a doomed man, I never voted the death of anybody, no matter whom, I was never punished, no one took a dislike to me, and I lived comfort-

ably with the three mates they gave me one after another—all three of them feared and liked me. But then I was well known in the prison before I got there, madame. A chauffeur! for I was supposed to be one of those brigands . . . I have seen them do it," Farrabesche went on in a low voice, after a pause, "but I never would help to torture folk, nor take any of the stolen money. I was a 'refractory conscript,' that was all. I used to help the rest, I was scout for them, I fought, I was forlorn sentinel, rearguard, what you will, but I never shed blood except in self-defence. Oh! I told M. Bonnet and my lawyer everything, and the judges knew quite well that I was not a murderer. But, all the same, I am a great criminal; the things that I have done are all against the law.

"Two of my old comrades had told them about me before I came. I was a man of whom the greatest things might be expected, they said. In the convicts' prison, you see, madame, there is nothing like a character of that kind; it is worth even more than money. A murder is a passport in this republic of wretchedness; they leave you in peace. I did nothing to destroy their opinion of me. I looked gloomy and resigned; it was possible to be misled by my face, and they were misled. My sullen manner and my silence were taken for signs of ferocity. Every one there, convicts and warders, young and old, respected me. I was president of my ward. I was never tormented at night, nor suspected of tale-telling. I lived honestly according to their rules; I never refused to do any one a good turn; I never showed a sign of disgust; in short, I 'howled with the wolves,' to all appearance, and in my secret soul I prayed to God. My last mate was a soldier, a lad of two-and-twenty, who had stolen something, and then deserted in consequence; I had him for four years. We were friends, and wherever I may be I can reckon on *him* when he comes out. The poor wretch, Guépin they called him, was not a rascal, he was only a hare-brained boy; his ten years will sober him down. Oh! if the rest

had known that it was religion that reconciled me to my fate; that when my time was up I meant to live in some corner without letting them know where I was, to forget those fearful creatures, and never to be in the way of meeting one of them again, they would very likely have driven me mad."

"But, then, suppose that some unhappy, sensitive boy had been carried away by passion, and—pardoned so far as the death penalty is concerned—?"

"Madame, a murderer is never fully pardoned. They begin by commuting the sentence for twenty years of penal servitude. But for a decent young fellow it is a thing to shudder at! It is impossible to tell you about the life in store for him; it would be a hundred times better for him that he should die! Yes, for such a death on the scaffold is good fortune."

"I did not dare to think it," said Mme. Graslin.

Véronique had grown white as wax. She leaned her forehead against the balustrade to hide her face for several moments. Farrabesche did not know whether he ought to go or stay. Then Mme. Graslin rose to her feet, and with an almost queenly look she said, to Farrabesche's great astonishment, "Thank you, my friend!" in tones that went to his heart. Then after a pause—"Where did you draw courage to live and suffer as you did?" she asked.

"Ah, madame, M. Bonnet had set a treasure in my soul! That is why I love him more than I have ever loved any one else in this world."

"More than Catherine?" asked Mme. Graslin, with a certain bitterness in her smile.

"Ah, madame, almost as much."

"How did he do it?"

"Madame, the things that he said and the tones of his voice subdued me. It was Catherine who showed him the way to the hiding-place in the chalk-land which I showed you the other day. He came to me quite alone. He was the new curé of Montégnac, he told me; I was his parish-

ioner, I was dear to him, he knew that I had only strayed from the path, that I was not yet lost; he did not mean to betray me, but to save me; in fact, he said things that thrill you to the very depths of your nature. And you see, madame, he can make you do right with all the force that other people take to make you do wrong. He told me, poor dear man, that Catherine was a mother; I was about to give over two creatures to shame and neglect. 'Very well,' said I, 'then they will be just as I am; I have no future before me.' He answered that I had two futures before me, and both of them bad—one in this world, the other in the next—unless I desisted and reformed. Here below I was bound to die on the scaffold. If I were caught, my defence would break down in a court of law. On the other hand, if I took advantage of the mildness of the new Government toward 'refractory conscripts' of many years' standing, and gave myself up, he would strain every nerve to save my life. He would find me a clever advocate who would pull me through with ten years' penal servitude. After that M. Bonnet talked to me of another life. Catherine cried like a Magdalen at that. There, madame," said Farrabesche, holding out his right hand, "she laid her face against *this*, and I felt it quite wet with her tears. She prayed me to live! M. le Curé promised to contrive a quiet and happy lot for me and for my child, even in this district, and undertook that no one should cast up the past to me. In short, he lectured me as if I had been a little boy. After three of those nightly visits I was as pliant as a glove. Do you care to know why, madame?"

Farrabesche and Mme. Graslin looked at each other, and neither of them to their secret souls explained the real motive of their mutual curiosity.

"Very well," the poor ticket-of-leave man continued, "the first time when he had gone away, and Catherine went, too, to show him the way back, and I was left alone, I felt a kind of freshness and calm and happiness such as I had not known since I was a child. It was

something like the happiness I had felt with poor Catherine. The love of this dear man, who had come to seek me out, the interest that he took in me, in my future, in my soul—it all worked upon me and changed me. It was as if a light arose in me. So long as he was with me and talked, I held out. How could I help it? He was a priest, and we bandits do not eat their bread. But when the sound of his footsteps and Catherine's died away—oh! I was, as he said two days later, 'enlightened by grace.'

"From that time forward, God gave me strength to endure everything—the jail, the sentence, the putting on of the irons, the journey, the life in the convicts' prison. I reckoned upon M. Bonnet's promise as upon the truth of the Gospel; I looked on my sufferings as a payment of arrears. Whenever things grew unbearable, I used to see, at the end of the ten years, this house in the woods, and my little Benjamin and Catherine there. Good M. Bonnet, he kept his promise; but some one else failed me. Catherine was not at the prison door when I came out, nor yet at the trysting place on the common lands. She must have died of grief. That is why I am always sad. Now, thanks to you, madame, I shall have work to do that needs doing; I shall put myself into it body and soul, so will my boy for whom I live—"

"You have shown me how it was that M. le Curé could bring about the changes in his parish—"

"Oh! nothing can resist him," said Farrabesche.

"No, no. I know that," Véronique answered briefly, and she dismissed Farrabesche with a sign of farewell.

Farrabesche went. Most of that day Véronique spent in pacing to and fro along the terrace, in spite of the drizzling rain that fell till evening came on. She was gloomy and sad. When Véronique's brows were thus contracted, neither her mother nor Aline dared to break in on her mood; she did not see her mother talking in the dusk with M. Bonnet, who, seeing that she must be roused from this appalling dejection, sent the child to find her. Little

Francis went up to his mother and took her hand, and Véronique suffered herself to be led away. At the sight of M. Bonnet she started with something almost like dismay. The curé led the way back to the terrace.

"Well, madame," he said, "what can you have been talking about with Farrabesche?"

Véronique did not wish to lie nor to answer the question; she replied to it by another—"Was he your first victory?"

"Yes," said M. Bonnet. "If I could win him, I felt sure of Montégnac; and so it proved."

Véronique pressed M. Bonnet's hand. "From to-day I am your penitent, M. le Curé," she said, with tears in her voice; "to-morrow I will make you a general confession."

The last words plainly spoke of a great inward struggle and a hardly won victory over herself. The curé led the way back to the chateau without a word, and stayed with her till dinner, talking over the vast improvements to be made in Montégnac.

"Agriculture is a question of time," he said. "The little that I know about it has made me understand how much may be done by a well-spent winter. Here are the rains beginning, you see; before long the mountains will be covered with snow, and your operations will be impossible; so hurry M. Grossetete."

M. Bonnet exerted himself to talk, and drew Mme. Graslin into the conversation; gradually her thoughts were forced to take another turn, and by the time he left her she had almost recovered from the day's excitement. But even so, Mme. Sauviat saw that her daughter was so terribly agitated that she spent the night with her.

Two days later a messenger sent by M. Grossetête arrived with the following letters for Mme. Graslin:

Grossetête to Mme. Graslin

"My dear Child—Horses are not easily to be found, but I hope that you are satisfied with the three which I sent you. If you need draught-horses or plow-horses, they

must be looked for elsewhere. It is better in any case to use oxen for plowing and as draught animals. In all districts where they use horses on the land, they lose their capital as soon as the animal is past work, while an ox, instead of being a loss, yields a profit to the farmer.

"I approve your enterprise in every respect, my child; you will find in it an outlet for the devouring mental energy which was turned against yourself and wearing you out. But when you ask me to find you, over and above the horses, a man able to second you, and more particularly to enter into your views, you ask me for one of those rare birds that we rear, it is true, in the provinces, but which we in no case keep among us. The training of the noble animal is too lengthy and too risky a speculation for us to undertake, and besides, we are afraid of these very clever folk—'eccentrics,' we call them.

"As a matter of fact, too, the men who are classed in the scientific category in which you are fain to find a co-operator are, as a rule, so prudent and so well provided for that I hardly liked to write to tell you how impossible it would be to come by such a prize. You asked me for a poet, or, if you prefer it, a madman; but all our madmen betake themselves to Paris. I did speak to one or two young fellows engaged on the land survey and assessments, contractors for embankments, or foremen employed on canal cuttings; but none of them thought it worth their while to entertain your proposals. Chance all at once threw in my way the very man you want, a young man whom I thought to help; for you will see by his letter that one ought not to set about doing a kindness in a happy-go-lucky fashion, and, indeed, an act of kindness requires more thinking about than anything else on this earth. You can never tell whether what seemed to you to be right at the time may not do harm by and by. By helping others we shape our own destinies; I see that now—"

As Mme. Graslin read those words, the letter dropped from her hands. For some moments she sat deep in thought.

"Oh, God," she cried, "when wilt Thou cease to smite me by every man's hand?"

Then she picked up the letters and read on—

"Gérard seems to me to have plenty of enthusiasm and a cool head; the very man for you! Paris is in a ferment just now with this leaven of new doctrine, and I shall be delighted if the young fellow keeps out of the snares spread by ambitious spirits, who work upon the instincts of the generous youth of France. The rather torpid existence of the provinces is not altogether what I like for him, but neither do I like the idea of the excitement of the life in Paris, and the enthusiasm for renovating, which urges youngsters into the new ways. You, and you only, know my opinions; to me it seems that the world of ideas revolves on its axis much as the material world does. Here is this poor protégé of mine wanting impossibilities. No power on earth could stand before ambitions so violent, imperious, and absolute. I have a liking myself for a jog trot; I like to go slowly in politics, and have but very little taste for the social topsy-turvydom which all these lofty spirits are minded to inflict upon us. To you I confide the principles of an old and crusted supporter of the monarchy, for you are discreet. I hold my tongue here among these good folk, who believe more and more in progress the further they get into a mess; but for all that, it hurts me to see the irreparable damage done already to our dear country.

"So I wrote and told the young man that a task worthy of him was waiting for him here. He is coming to see you; for though his letter (which I inclose) will give you a very fair idea of him, you would like to see him as well, would you not? You women can tell so much from the look of people; and besides, you ought not to have any one, however insignificant, in your service unless you like him. If he is not the man you want, you can decline his services; but if he suits you, dear child, cure him of his flimsily disguised ambitions, induce him to adopt the happy and peace-

ful life of the fields, a life in which beneficence is perpetual, where all the qualities of great and strong natures are continually brought into play, where the products of Nature are a daily source of new wonder, and a man finds worthy occupation in making a real advance and practical improvements. I do not in any way overlook the fact that great deeds come of great ideas—great theories; but as ideas of that kind are seldom met with, I think that, for the most part, practical attainments are worth more than ideas. A man who brings a bit of land into cultivation, or a tree or fruit to perfection, who makes grass grow where grass would not grow before, ranks a good deal higher than the seeker after formulas for humanity. In what has Newton's science changed the lot of the worker in the fields? . . . Ah! my dear, I loved you before, but to-day, appreciating to the full the task which you have set before you, I love you far more. You are not forgotten here in Limoges, and every one admires your great resolution of improving Montégnac. Give us our little due, in that we have the wit to admire nobility when we see it, and do not forget that the first of your admirers is also your earliest friend. F. GROSSETÊTE."

Gérard to Grossetête

"I come to you, monsieur, with sad confidences, but you have been like a father to me, when you might have been simply a patron. So to you alone, who have made me anything that I am, can I make them. I have fallen a victim to a cruel disease, a disease, moreover, not of the body; I am conscious that I am completely unfitted by my thoughts, feelings, and opinions, and by the whole bent of my mind, to do what is expected of me by the Government and by society. Perhaps this will seem to you to be a piece of ingratitude, but it is simply and solely an indictment that I address to you.

"When I was twelve years old you saw the signs of a certain aptitude for the exact sciences, and a precocious ambition to succeed, in a working man's son, and it was through you, my generous godfather, that I took my flight

toward higher spheres; but for you I should be following out my original destiny, I should be a carpenter like my poor father, who did not live to rejoice in my success. And most surely, monsieur, you did me a kindness; there is no day on which I do not bless you; and so, perhaps, it is I who am in the wrong. But whether right or wrong, I am unhappy; and does not the fact that I pour out my complaints to you set you very high? Is it not as if I made of you a supreme judge, like God? In any case, I trust to your indulgence.

"I studied the exact sciences so hard between the ages of sixteen and eighteen that I made myself ill, as you know. My whole future depended on my admission to the Ecole polytechnique. The work I did at that time was a disproportionate training for the intellect; I all but killed myself; I studied day and night; I exerted myself to do more than I was perhaps fit for. I was determined to pass my examinations so well that I should be sure not only of admittance into the Ecole, but of a free education there, for I wanted to spare you the expense, and I succeeded!

"It makes me shudder now to think of that appalling conscription of brains yearly made over to the Government by family ambition; a conscription which demands such severe study at a time when a lad is almost a man, and growing fast in every way, cannot but do incalculable mischief; many precious faculties which later would have developed and grown strong and powerful are extinguished by the light of the student's lamp. Nature's laws are inexorable; they are not to be thrust aside by the schemes nor at the pleasure of society; and the laws of the physical world, the laws which govern the nature without, hold good no less of human nature—every abuse must be paid for. If you must have fruit out of season, you have it from a forcing house either at the expense of the tree or of the quality of the fruit. La Quintinie killed the orange-trees that Louis XIV. might have a bouquet of orange-blossoms every morning throughout the year. Any heavy demand made on a still growing intellect is a draft on its future.

"The pressing and special need of our age is the spirit of the lawgiver. Europe has so far seen no lawgiver since Jesus Christ; and Christ, who gave us no vestige of a political code, left His work incomplete. For example, before technical schools were established, and the present means of filling them with scholars was adopted, did they call in one of the great thinkers who hold in their heads the immensity of the sum of the relations of the institution to human brain-power; who can balance the advantages and disadvantages, and study in the past the laws of the future? Was any inquiry made into the after-lives of men who, for their misfortune, knew the circle of the sciences at too early an age? Was any estimate of their rarity attempted? Was their fate ascertained? Was it discovered how they contrived to endure the continual strain of thought? How many of them died like Pascal, prematurely, worn out by science? Some, again, lived to old age; when did these begin their studies? Was it known then, is it known now as I write, what conformation of the brain is best fitted to stand the strain, and to cope prematurely with knowledge? Is it so much as suspected that this is before all things a physiological question?

"Well, I think myself that the general rule is that the vegetative period of adolescence should be prolonged. There are exceptions; there are some so constituted that they are capable of this effort in youth, but the result is the shortening of life in most cases. Clearly the man of genius who can stand the precocious exercise of his faculties is bound to be an exception among exceptions. If medical testimony and social data bear me out, our way of recruiting for the technical schools in France works as much havoc among the best human specimens of each generation as La Quintinie's process among the orange-trees.

"But to continue (for I will append my doubts to each series of facts), I began my work anew at the Ecole, and with more enthusiasm than ever. I meant to leave it as successfully as I had entered it. Between the ages of nineteen and one-and-twenty I worked with all my might, and developed

my faculties by their constant exercise. Those two years set the crown on the three which came before them, when I was only preparing to do great things. And then, what pride did I not feel when I had won the privilege of choosing the career most to my mind? I might be a military or marine engineer, might go on the staff of the Artillery, into the Mines department, or the Roads and Bridges. I took your advice, and became a civil engineer.

"Yet where I triumphed, how many fell out of the ranks! You know that from year to year the Government raises the standard of the Ecole. The work grows harder and more trying from time to time. The course of preparatory study through which I went was nothing compared with the work at fever-heat in the Ecole, to the end that every physical science—mathematics, astronomy, and chemistry, and the terminologies of each—may be packed into the heads of so many young men between the ages of nineteen and twenty-one. The Government here in France, which in so many ways seems to aim at taking the place of the paternal authority, has in this respect no bowels—no father's pity for its children; it makes its experiments *in anima vili*. The ugly statistics of the mischief it has wrought have never been asked for; no one has troubled to inquire how many cases of brain fever there have been during the last thirty-six years; how many explosions of despair among those young lads; no one takes account of the moral destruction which decimates the victims. I lay stress on this painful aspect of the problem, because it occurs by the way, and before the final result; for a few weaklings the result comes soon instead of late. You know, besides, that these victims, whose minds work slowly, or who, it may be, are temporarily stupefied with overwork, are allowed to stay for three years instead of two at the Ecole, but the way these are regarded there has no very favorable influence on their capacity. In fact, it may chance that young men, who at a later day will show that they have something in them, may leave the Ecole without an appointment at all, because at the final examination they

do not exhibit the amount of knowledge required of them. These are 'plucked,' as they say, and Napoleon used to make sub-lieutenants of them. In these days the 'plucked' candidate represents a vast loss of capital invested by families, and a loss of time for the lad himself.

"But, after all, I myself succeeded! At the age of one-and-twenty I had gone over all the ground discovered in mathematics by men of genius, and I was impatient to distinguish myself by going further. The desire is so natural that almost every student when he leaves the Ecole fixes his eyes on the sun called glory in an invisible heaven. The first thought in all our minds was to be a Newton, a Laplace, or a Vauban. Such are the efforts which France requires of young men who leave the famous Ecole polytechnique!

"And now let us see what becomes of the men sorted and sifted with such care out of a whole generation. At one-and-twenty we dream dreams, a whole lifetime lies before us, we expect wonders. I entered the School of Roads and Bridges, and became a civil engineer. I studied construction, and with what enthusiasm! You must remember it. In 1826, when I left the School, at the age of twenty-four, I was still only a civil engineer on my promotion, with a Government grant of a hundred and fifty francs a month. The worst paid bookkeeper in Paris will earn as much by the time he is eighteen, and with four hours' work in the day. By unhoped-for good luck, it may be because my studies had brought me distinction, I received an appointment as a surveyor in 1828. I was twenty-six years old. They sent me, you know where, into a sub-prefecture with a salary of two thousand five hundred francs. The money matters nothing. My lot is at any rate more brilliant than a carpenter's son has a right to expect; but what journeyman grocer put into a shop at the age of sixteen will not be fairly on the way to an independence by the time he is six-and-twenty?

"Then I found out the end to which these terrible displays of intelligence were directed, and why the gigantic efforts, required of us by the Government, were made. The

Government set me to count paving stones and measure the heaps of road-metal by the waysides. I must repair, keep in order, and occasionally construct runnels and culverts, maintain the ways, clean out and occasionally open ditches. At the office I must answer all questions relating to the alignment or the planting and felling of trees. These are, in fact, the principal and often the only occupations of an ordinary surveyor. Perhaps from time to time there is some bit of levelling to be done, and that we are obliged to do ourselves, though any of the foremen with his practical experience could do the work a good deal better than we can with all our science.

"There are nearly four hundred of us altogether—ordinary surveyors and assistants—and as there are only some hundred odd engineers-in-chief, all the subordinates cannot hope for promotion; there is practically no higher rank to absorb the engineers-in-chief, for twelve or fifteen inspectors-general or divisionaries scarcely count, and their posts are almost as much of sinecures in our corps as colonelcies in the artillery when the battery is united with it. An ordinary civil engineer, like a captain of artillery, knows all that is known about his work; he ought not to need any one to look after him except an administrative head to connect the eighty-six engineers with each other and the Government, for a single engineer with two assistants is quite enough for a department. A hierarchy in such a body as ours works in this way. Energetic minds are subordinated to old effete intelligences, who think themselves bound to distort and alter (they think for the better) the draughts submitted to them; perhaps they do this simply to give some reason for their existence; and this, it seems to me, is the only influence exerted on public works in France by the General Council of Roads and Bridges.

"Let us suppose, however, that between the ages of thirty and forty I become an engineer of the first-class, and am an engineer-in-chief by the time I am fifty. Alas! I foresee my future; it lies before my eyes. My engineer-in-chief is

a man of sixty. He left the famous Ecole with distinction, as I did; he has grown gray in two departments over such work as I am doing; he has become the most commonplace man imaginable, has fallen from the heights of attainment he once reached; nay, more than that, he is not even abreast of science. Science has made progress, and he has remained stationary; worse still, has forgotten what he once knew! The man who came to the front at the age of twenty-two with every sign of real ability has nothing of it left now but the appearance. At the very outset of his career his education was especially directed to mathematics and the exact sciences, and he took no interest in anything that was not 'in his line.' You would scarcely believe it, but the man knows absolutely nothing of other branches of learning. Mathematics have dried up his heart and brain. I cannot tell any one but you what a nullity he really is, screened by the name of the Ecole polytechnique. The label is impressive; and people, being prejudiced in his favor, do not dare to throw any doubt on his ability. But to you I may say that his befogged intellects have cost the department in one affair a million francs, where two hundred thousand should have been ample. I was for protesting, for opening the prefect's eyes, and what not; but a friend of mine, another surveyor, told me about a man in the corps who became a kind of black sheep in the eyes of the Administration by doing something of this sort. 'Would you yourself be very much pleased, when you are engineer-in-chief, to have your mistakes shown up by a subordinate?' asked he. 'Your engineer-in-chief will be a divisionary inspector before very long. As soon as one of us makes some egregious blunder, the Administration (which, of course, must never be in the wrong) withdraws the perpetrator from active service and makes him an inspector.' That is how the reward due to a capable man becomes a sort of premium on stupidity.

"All France saw one disaster in the heart of Paris, the miserable collapse of the first suspension bridge which an engineer (a member of the Académie des Sciences moreover)

endeavored to construct, a collapse caused by blunders which would not have been made by the constructor of the Canal de Briare in the time of Henri IV., nor by the monk who built the Pont Royal. Him too the Administration consoled by a summons to the Board of the General Council.

"Are the technical schools really manufactories of incompetence? The problem requires prolonged observation. If there is anything in what I say, a reform is needed, at any rate in the way in which they are carried on, for I do not venture to question the usefulness of the Ecoles. Still, looking back over the past, does it appear that France has ever lacked men of great ability at need, or the talent she tries to hatch as required in these days by Monge's method? What school turned out Vauban save the great school called 'vocation'? Who was Riquet's master? When genius has raised itself above the social level, urged upward by a vocation, it is almost always fully equipped; and in that case your man is no 'specialist,' but has something universal in his gift. I do not believe that any engineer who ever left the Ecole could build one of the miracles of architecture which Leonardo da Vinci reared; Leonardo at once mechanician, architect, and painter, one of the inventors of hydraulic science, the indefatigable constructor of canals. They are so accustomed while yet in their teens to the bald simplicity of geometry, that by the time they leave the Ecole they have quite lost all feeling for grace or ornament; a column to their eyes is a useless waste of material; they return to the point where art begins—on utility they take their stand, and stay there.

"But this is as nothing compared with the disease which is consuming me. I feel that a most terrible change is being wrought in me; I feel that my energy and faculties, after the exorbitant strain put upon them, are dwindling and growing feeble. The influence of my humdrum life is creeping over me. After such efforts as mine, I feel that I am destined to do great things, and I am confronted by the most trivial task work, such as verifying yards of road metal, inspecting high-

ways, checking inventories of stores. I have not enough to do to fill two hours in the day.

"I watch my colleagues marry and fall out of touch with modern thought. Is my ambition really immoderate? I should like to serve my country. My country required me to give proof of no ordinary powers, and bade me become an encyclopedia of the sciences—and here I am, folding my arms in an obscure corner of a province. I am not allowed to leave the place where I am penned up, to exercise my wits by trying new and useful experiments elsewhere. A vague indefinable grudge is the certain reward awaiting any one of us who follows his own inspirations, and does more than the department requires of him. The most that such a man ought to hope for is that his overweening presumption may be passed over, his talent neglected, while his project receives decent burial in the pigeon-holes at headquarters. What will Vicat's reward be, I wonder? (Between ourselves, Vicat is the only man among us who has made any real advance in the science of construction.)

"The General Council of Roads and Bridges is partly made up of men worn out by long and sometimes honorable service, but whose remaining brain power only exerts itself negatively; these gentlemen erase anything that they cannot understand at their age, and act as a sort of extinguisher to be put when required on audacious innovations. The Council might have been created for the express purpose of paralyzing the arm of the generous younger generation, which only asks for leave to work, and would fain serve France.

"Monstrous things happen in Paris. The future of a province depends on the *visa* of these bureaucrats. I have not time to tell you all about the intrigues which balk the best schemes; for them the best schemes are, as a matter of fact, those which open up the best prospects of money-making to the greed of speculators and companies, which knock most abuses on the head, for abuses are always stronger than the spirit of improvement in France. In five years' time my old self-will no longer exists. I shall see my ambitions die out

in me, and my noble desire to use the faculties which my country bade me display, and then left to rust in my obscure corner.

"Taking the most favorable view possible, my outlook seems to me to be very poor. I took advantage of leave of absence to come to Paris. I want to change my career, to find scope for my energies, knowledge, and activity. I shall send in my resignation, and go to some country where men with my special training are needed, where great things may be done. If none of all this is possible, I will throw in my lot with some of these new doctrines which seem as if they must make some great change in the present order of things, by directing the workers to better purpose. For what are we but laborers without work, tools lying idle in the warehouse? We are organized as if it was a question of shaking the globe, and we are required to do—nothing.

"I am conscious that there is something great in me which is pining away and will perish; I tell you this with mathematical explicitness. But I should like to have your advice before I make a change in my condition. I look on myself as your son, and should never take any important step without consulting you, for your experience is as great as your goodness. I know, of course, that when the Government has obtained its specially trained men, it can no more set its engineers to construct public monuments than it can declare war to give the army an opportunity of winning great battles and of finding out which are its great captains. But, then, as the man has never failed to appear when circumstances called for him; as, at the moment when there is much money to be spent and great things to be done, one of these unique men of genius springs up from the crowd; and as, particularly in matters of this kind, one Vauban is enough at a time, nothing could better demonstrate the utter uselessness of the institution. In conclusion, when a picked man's mental energies have been stimulated by all this preparation, how can the Government help seeing that he will make any amount of struggle before he

allows himself to be effaced? Is it wise policy? What is it but a way of kindling burning ambition? Would they bid all those perfervid heads learn to calculate anything and everything but the probabilities of their own futures?

"There are, no doubt, exceptions among some six hundred young men, some firm and unbending characters, who decline to be withdrawn in this way from circulation. I know some of them; but if the story of their struggles with men and things could be told in full; if it were known how that, while full of useful projects and ideas which would put life and wealth into stagnant country districts, they meet with hindrances put in their way by the very men who (so the Government led them to believe) would give them help and countenance, the strong man, the man of talent, the man whose nature is a miracle, would be thought a hundred times more unfortunate and more to be pitied than the man whose degenerate nature tamely resigns himself to the atrophy of his faculties.

"So I would prefer to direct some private commercial or industrial enterprise, and live on very little, while trying to find a solution of some one of the many unsolved problems of industry and modern life, rather than remain where I am. You will say that there is nothing to prevent me from employing my powers as it is; that in the silence of this humdrum life I might set myself to find the solution of one of those problems which presses on humanity. Ah! monsieur, do you not understand what the influence of the provinces is; the enervating effect of a life just sufficiently busy to fill the days with all but futile work, but yet not full enough to give occupation to the powers so fully developed by such a training as ours? You will not think, my dear guardian, that I am eaten up with the ambition of money-making, or consumed with a mad desire for fame. I have not learned to calculate to so little purpose that I cannot measure the emptiness of fame. The inevitable activity of the life has led me not to think of marriage; and looking at my present prospects, I have not so good an opin-

ion of existence as to give such a sorry present to another self. Although I look upon money as one of the most powerful instruments that can be put in the hands of a civilized man, money is, after all, only a means. My sole pleasure lies in the assurance that I am serving my country. To have employment for my faculties in a congenial atmosphere would be the height of enjoyment for me. Perhaps among your acquaintance in your part of the world, in the circle on which you shine, you might hear of something which requires some of the aptitude which you know that I possess; I will wait six months for an answer from you.

"These things which I am writing to you, dear patron and friend, others are thinking. I have seen a good many of my colleagues or old scholars at the Ecole, caught, as I was, in the snare of a special training; ordnance surveyors, captain-professors, captains in the Artillery, doomed (as they see) to be captains for the rest of their days, bitterly regretting that they did not go into the regular army. Again and again, in fact, we have admitted to each other in confidence that we are victims of a long mystification, which we only discover when it is too late to draw back, when the mill-horse is used to the round, and the sick man accustomed to his disease.

"After looking carefully into these melancholy results, I have asked myself the following questions, which I send to you, as a man of sense, whose mature wisdom will see all that lies in them, knowing that they are fruit of thought refined by the fires of painful experience.

"What end has the Government in view? To obtain the best abilities? If so, the Government sets to work to obtain a directly opposite result: if it had hated talent, it could not have had better success in producing respectable mediocrities.—Or does it intend to open out a career to selected intelligence? It could not well have given it a more mediocre position. There is not a man sent out by the Écoles who does not regret between fifty and sixty that he fell into the snare concealed by the offers of the Govern-

ment.—Does it mean to secure men of genius? What really great man have the Ecoles turned out since 1790? Would Cachin, the genius to whom we owe Cherbourg, have existed but for Napoleon? It was Imperial despotism which singled him out; the Constitutional Administration would have stifled him.—Does the Académie des Sciences number many members who have passed through the technical schools? Two or three, it may be; but the man of genius invariably appears from outside. In the particular sciences which are studied at these schools, genius obeys no laws but its own; it only develops under circumstances over which we have no control; and neither the Government nor anthropology knows the conditions. Riquet, Perronet, Leonardo da Vinci, Cachin, Palladio, Brunelleschi, Michelangelo, Bramante, Vauban, and Vicat all derived their genius from unobserved causes and preparation to which we give the name of chance—the great word for fools to fall back upon. Schools or no schools, these sublime workers have never been lacking in every age. And now, does the Government, by means of organizing, obtain works of public utility better done or at a cheaper rate?

"In the first place, private enterprise does very well without professional engineers; and, in the second, State-directed works are the most expensive of all; and besides the actual outlay, there is the cost of the maintenance of the great staff of the Roads and Bridges Department. Finally, in other countries where they have no institutions of this kind, in Germany, England, and Italy, such public works are carried out quite as well, and cost less than ours in France. Each of the three countries is well known for new and useful inventions of this kind. I know it is the fashion to speak of our Écoles as if they were the envy of Europe; but Europe has been watching us these fifteen years, and nowhere will you find the like instituted elsewhere. The English, those shrewd men of business, have better schools among their working classes, where they train practical men, who become conspicuous at once when they

rise from practical work to theory. Stephenson and Macadam were not pupils in these famous institutions of ours.

"But where is the use? When young and clever engineers, men of spirit and enthusiasm, have solved at the outset of their career the problem of the maintenance of the roads of France, which requires hundreds of millions of francs every twenty-five years, which roads are in a deplorable state, it is in vain for them to publish learned treatises and memorials; everything is swallowed down by the board of direction, everything goes in and nothing comes out of a central bureau in Paris, where the old men are jealous of their juniors, and high places are refuges for superannuated blunderers.

"This is how, with a body of educated men distributed all over France, a body which is part of the machinery of administrative government, and to whom the country looks for direction and enlightenment on the great questions within their department, it will probably happen that we in France shall still be talking about railways when other countries have finished theirs. Now, if ever France ought to demonstrate the excellence of her technical schools as an institution, should it not be in a magnificent public work of this special kind, destined to change the face of many countries, and to double the length of human life by modifying the laws of time and space? Belgium, the United States, Germany, and England, without an École polytechnique, will have a network of railways while our engineers are still tracing out the plans, and hideous jobbery lurking behind the projects will check their execution. You cannot lay a stone in France until half a score of scribblers in Paris have drawn up a drivelling report that nobody wants. The Government, therefore, gets no good of its technical schools; and as for the individual—he is tied down to a mediocre career, his life is a cruel delusion. Certain it is that with the abilities which he displayed between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five he would have gained more reputation and riches if he had been left to shift for himself than he will

acquire in the career to which Government condemns him. As a merchant, a scientific man, or a soldier, this picked man would have a wide field before him, his precious faculties and enthusiasm would not have been prematurely and stupidly exhausted. Then where is the advance? Assuredly the individual and the State both lose by the present system. Does not an experiment carried on for half a century show that changes are needed in the way the institution is worked? What priesthood qualifies a man for the task of selecting from a whole generation those who shall hereafter be the learned class of France? What studies should not these high priests of Destiny have made? A knowledge of mathematics is, perhaps, scarcely so necessary as physiological knowledge; and does it not seem to you that something of that clairvoyance which is the wizardry of great men might be required too? As a matter of fact, the examiners are old professors, men worthy of all honor, grown old in harness; their duty it is to discover the best memories, and there is an end of it; they can do nothing but what is required of them. Truly their functions should be the most important ones in the State, and call for extraordinary men to fulfil them.

"Do not think, my dear friend and patron, that my censure is confined to the École through which I myself passed; it applies not only to the institution itself, but also and still more to the methods by which lads are admitted; that is to say, to the system of competitive examination. Competition is a modern invention, and essentially bad. It is bad not only in learning but in every possible connection, in the arts, in every election made of men, projects, or things. It is unfortunate that our famous schools should not have turned out better men than any other chance assemblage of lads; but it is still more disgraceful that among the prizemen at the Institute there has been no great painter, musician, architect, or sculptor; even as for the past twenty years the general elections have swept no single great statesman to the front out of all the shoals of mediocrities.

My remarks have a bearing upon an error which is vitiating both politics and education in France. This cruel error is based on the following principle, which organizers have overlooked:

"'*Nothing in experience or in the nature of things can warrant the assumption that the intellectual qualities of early manhood will be those of maturity.*'

"At the present time I have been brought in contact with several distinguished men who are studying the many moral maladies which prey upon France. They recognize, as I do, the fact that secondary education forces a sort of temporary capacity in those who have neither present work nor future prospects; and that the enlightenment diffused by primary education is of no advantage to the State, because it is bereft of belief and sentiment.

"Our whole educational system calls for sweeping reform which should be carried out under the direction of a man of profound knowledge, a man with a strong will, gifted with that legislative faculty which, possibly, is found in Jean-Jacques Rousseau alone of all moderns.

"Then, perhaps, the superfluous specialists might find employment in elementary teaching; it is badly needed by the mass of the people. We have not enough patient and devoted teachers for the training of these classes. The deplorable prevalence of crimes and misdemeanors points to a weak spot in our social system—the one-sided education which tends to weaken the fabric of society, by teaching the masses to think sufficiently to reject the religious beliefs necessary for their government, yet not enough to raise them to a conception of the theory of obedience and duty, which is the last word of transcendental philosophy. It is impossible to put a whole nation through a course of Kant; and belief and use and wont are more wholesome for the people than study and argument.

"If I had to begin again from the very beginning, I dare say I might enter a seminary and incline to the life of a simple country parson or a village schoolmaster. But now I have

gone too far to be a mere elementary teacher; and, besides, a wider field of action is open to me than the schoolhouse or the parish. I cannot go the whole way with the Saint-Simonians, with whom I am tempted to throw in my lot; but with all their mistakes, they have laid a finger on many weak points in our social system, the results of our legislation, which will be palliated rather than remedied—simply putting off the evil day for France.—Good-by, dear sir; in spite of these observations of mine, rest assured of my respectful and faithful friendship, a friendship which can only grow with time. GREGOIRE GERARD."

Acting on old business habit, Grossetête had indorsed the letter with the rough draught of a reply, and written beneath it the sacramental word "Answered."

"MY DEAR GERARD—It is the more unnecessary to enter upon any discussion of the observations contained in your letter, since that chance (to make use of the word for fools) enables me to make you an offer which will practically extricate you from a position in which you find yourself so ill at ease. Mme. Graslin, who owns the forest of Montégnac, and a good deal of barren land below the long range of hills on which the forest lies, has a notion of turning her vast estates to some account, of exploiting the woods and bringing the stony land into cultivation. Small pay and plenty of work! A great result to be brought about by insignificant means, a district to be transformed! Abundance made to spring up on the barest rock! Is not this what you wished to do, you who would fain realize a poet's dream? From the sincere ring of your letter, I do not hesitate to ask you to come to Limoges to see me; but do not send in your resignation, my friend, only sever your connection with your corps, explain to the authorities that you are about to make a study of some problems that lie within your province, but outside the limits of your work for the Government. In that way you will lose none of your privileges, and you will gain

time in which to decide whether this scheme of the curé's at Montégnac, which finds favor in Mme. Graslin's eyes, is a feasible one. If these vast changes should prove to be practicable, I will lay the possible advantages before you by word of mouth, and not by letter.—Believe me to be, always sincerely, your friend, GROSSETÊTE."

For all reply Mme. Graslin wrote—"Thank you, my friend; I am waiting to see your protégé."

She showed the letter to M. Bonnet with the remark, "Here is one more wounded creature seeking the great hospital!"

The curé read the letter and re-read it, took two or three turns upon the terrace, and handed the paper back to Mme. Graslin.

"It comes from a noble nature, the man has something in him," he said. "He writes that the schools, invented by the spirit of the Revolution, manufacture ineptitude; for my own part, I call them manufactories of unbelief; for if M. Gérard is not an atheist, he is a Protestant—"

"We will ask him," she said, struck with the curé's answer.

A fortnight later, in the month of December, M. Grossetête came to Montégnac, in spite of the cold, to introduce his protégé. Véronique and M. Bonnet awaited his arrival with impatience.

"One must love you very much, my child," said the old man, taking both of Véronique's hands, and kissing them with the old-fashioned elderly gallantry which a woman never takes amiss; "yes, one must love you very much indeed to stir out of Limoges in such weather as this; but I had made up my mind that I must come in person to make you a present of M. Grégoire Gérard. Here he is.—A man after your own heart, M. Bonnet," the old banker added with an affectionate greeting to the curé.

Gérard's appearance was not very prepossessing. He was

a thick-set man of middle height; his neck was lost in his shoulders, to use the common expression; he had the golden hair and red eyes of an Albino; and his eyelashes and eyebrows were almost white. Although, as often happens in these cases, his complexion was dazzlingly fair, its original beauty was destroyed by the very apparent pits and seams left by an attack of smallpox; much reading had doubtless injured his eyesight, for he wore colored spectacles. Nor when he divested himself of a thick overcoat, like a gendarme's, did his dress redeem these personal defects.

The way in which his clothes were put on and buttoned, like his untidy cravat and crumpled shirt, were distinctive signs of that personal carelessness, laid to the charge of learned men, who are all more or less oblivious of their surroundings. His face and bearing, the great development of chest and shoulders as compared with his thin legs, suggested a sort of physical deterioration produced by meditative habits, not uncommon in those who think much; but the stout heart and eager intelligence of the writer of the letter were plainly visible on a forehead which might have been chiselled in Carrara marble. Nature seemed to have reserved her seal of greatness for the brow, and stamped it with the steadfastness and goodness of the man. The nose was of the true Gallic type, and blunted. The firm, straight lines of the mouth indicated an absolute discretion and the sense of economy; but the whole face looked old before its time, and worn with study.

Mme. Graslin turned to speak to the inventor. "We already owe you thanks, monsieur," she said, "for being so good as to come to superintend engineering work in a country which can hold out no inducements to you save the satisfaction of knowing that you can do good."

"M. Grossetête told me enough about you on our way here, madame," he answered, "to make me feel very glad to be of any use to you. The prospect of living near to you and M. Bonnet seemed to me charming. Unless I am driven away, I look to spend my life here."

"We will try to give you no cause for changing your opinion," smiled Mme. Graslin.

Grossetete took her aside. "Here are the papers which the public prosecutor gave me," he said. "He seemed very much surprised that you did not apply directly to him. All that you have asked has been done promptly and with good-will. In the first place, your protégé will be reinstated in all his rights as a citizen; and in the second, Catherine Curieux will be sent to you in three months' time."

"Where is she?" asked Véronique.

"At the Hôpital Saint-Louis," Grossetete answered. "She cannot leave Paris until she is recovered."

"Ah! is she ill, poor thing?"

"You will find all that you want to know here," said Grossetete, holding out a packet.

Véronique went back to her guests, and led the way to the magnificent dining-hall on the ground floor, walking between Grossetete and Gérard. She presided over the dinner without joining them, for she had made it a rule to take her meals alone since she had come to Montégnac. No one but Aline was in the secret, which the girl kept scrupulously until her mistress was in danger of her life.

The mayor of Montégnac, the justice of the peace, and the doctor had naturally been invited to meet the new-comer.

The doctor, a young man of seven-and-twenty, Roubaud by name, was keenly desirous of making the acquaintance of the great lady of Limousin. The curé was the better pleased to introduce him at the chateau since it was M. Bonnet's wish that Véronique should gather some sort of society about her, to distract her thoughts from herself, and to find some mental food. Roubaud was one of the young doctors perfectly equipped in his science, such as the Ecole de médecine turns out in Paris, a man who might, without doubt, have looked to a brilliant future in the vast theatre of the capital; but he had seen something of the strife of ambitions there, and took fright, conscious that he had more knowledge than capacity for scheming, more aptitude than greed; his

gentle nature had inclined him to the narrower theatre of provincial life, where he hoped to win appreciation sooner than in Paris.

At Limoges Roubaud had come into collision with old-fashioned ways and patients not to be shaken in their prejudices; he had been won over by M. Bonnet, who at sight of the kindly and prepossessing face had thought that here was a worker to co-operate with him. Roubaud was short and fair-haired, and would have been rather uninteresting looking but for the gray eyes, which revealed the physiologist's sagacity and the perseverance of the student. Hitherto Montégnac was fain to be content with an old army surgeon, who found his cellars a good deal more interesting than his patients, and who, moreover, was past the hard work of a country doctor. He happened to die just at that time. Roubaud had been in Montégnac for some eighteen months, and was very popular there; but Desplein's young disciple, one of the followers of Cabanis, was no Catholic in his beliefs. In fact, as to religion, he had lapsed into a fatal indifference, from which he was not to be roused. He was the despair of the curé, not that there was any harm whatever in him, his invariable absence from church was excused by his profession, he never talked on religious topics, he was incapable of making proselytes, no good Catholic could have behaved better than he, but he declined to occupy himself with a problem which, to his thinking, was beyond the scope of the human mind; and the curé once hearing him let fall the remark that Pantheism was the religion of all great thinkers, fancied that Roubaud inclined to the Pythagorean doctrine of the transformation of souls.

Roubaud, meeting Mme. Graslin for the first time, felt violently startled at the sight of her. His medical knowledge enabled him to divine in her face and bearing and worn features unheard-of suffering of mind and body, a preternatural strength of character, and the great faculties which can endure the strain of very different vicissitudes. He, in a manner, read her inner history, even the dark places delib-

erately hidden away; and more than this, he saw the disease that preyed upon the secret heart of this fair woman; for there are certain tints in human faces that indicate a poison working in the thoughts, even as the color of fruit will betray the presence of the worm at its core. From that time forward M. Roubaud felt so strongly attracted to Mme. Graslin that he feared to be drawn beyond the limit where friendship ends. There was an eloquence, which men always understand, in Véronique's brows and attitude, and, above all, in her eyes; it was sufficiently unmistakable that she was dead to love, even as other women with a like eloquence proclaim the contrary. The doctor became her chivalrous worshipper on the spot. He exchanged a swift glance with the curé, and M. Bonnet said within himself—"Here is the flash from heaven that will change this poor unbeliever! Mme. Graslin will have more eloquence than I."

The mayor, an old countryman, overawed by the splendor of the dining-room, and surprised to be asked to meet one of the richest men in the department, had put on his best clothes for the occasion; he felt somewhat uneasy in them, and scarcely more at ease with his company. Mme. Graslin, too, in her mourning dress was an awe-inspiring figure; the worthy mayor was dumb. He had once been a farmer at Saint-Léonard, had bought the one habitable house in the township, and cultivated the land that belonged to it himself. He could read and write, but only managed to acquit himself in his official capacity with the help of the justice's clerk, who prepared his work for him; so he ardently desired the advent of a notary, meaning to lay the burden of his public duties on official shoulders when that day should come; but Montégnac was so poverty-stricken that a resident notary was hardly needed, and the notaries of the principal place in the arrondissement found clients in Montégnac.

The justice of the peace, Clousier by name, was a retired barrister from Limoges. Briefs had grown scarce with the learned gentleman, owing to a tendency on his part to put in practice the noble maxim that a barrister is the first judge

of the client and the case. About the year 1809 he obtained this appointment; the salary was a meagre pittance, but enough to live upon. In this way he had reached the most honorable but the most complete penury. Twenty-two years of residence in the poor commune had transformed the worthy lawyer into a countryman, scarcely to be distinguished from any of the small farmers round about, whom he resembled even in the cut of his coat. But beneath Clousier's homely exterior dwelt a clairvoyant spirit, a philosophical politician whose Gallio's attitude was due to his perfect knowledge of human nature and of men's motives. For a long time he had baffled M. Bonnet's perspicacity. The man who, in a higher sphere, might have played the active part of a L'Hôpital, incapable of intrigue, like all deep thinkers, had come at last to lead the contemplative life of a hermit of olden time. Rich without doubt, with all the gains of privation, he was swayed by no personal considerations; he knew the law and judged impartially. His life, reduced to the barest necessaries, was regular and pure. The peasants loved and respected M. Clousier for the fatherly disinterestedness with which he settled their disputes and gave advice in their smallest difficulties. For the last two years "Old Clousier," as every one called him in Montégnac, had had one of his nephews to help him, a rather intelligent young man, who, at a later day, contributed not a little to the prosperity of the commune.

The most striking thing about the old man's face was the broad vast forehead. Two bushy masses of white hair stood out on either side of it. A florid complexion and magisterial portliness might give the impression that (in spite of his real sobriety) he was as earnest a disciple of Bacchus as of Troplong and Toullier. His scarcely audible voice indicated asthmatic oppression of breathing; possibly the dry air of Montégnac had counted for something in his decision when he made up his mind to accept the post. His little house had been fitted up for him by the well-to-do sabot maker, his landlord. Clousier had already seen Véronique at church, and had formed his own opinion of her, which opinion he

kept to himself; he had not even spoken of her to M. Bonnet, with whom he was beginning to feel at home. For the first time in his life, the justice of the peace found himself in the company of persons able to understand him.

When the six guests had taken their places round a handsomely-appointed table (for Véronique had brought all her furniture with her to Montégnac), there was a brief embarrassed pause. The doctor, the mayor, and the justice were none of them acquainted with Grossetete or with Gérard. But during the first course the banker's geniality thawed the ice, Mme. Graslin graciously encouraged M. Roubaud and drew out Gérard; under her influence all these different natures, full of exquisite qualities, recognized their kinship. It was not long before each felt himself to be in a congenial atmosphere. So by the time dessert was put on the table, and the crystal and the gilded edges of the porcelain sparkled, when choice wines were set in circulation, handed to the guests by Aline, Maurice Champion and Grossetete's man, the conversation had become more confidential, so that the four noble natures thus brought together by chance felt free to speak their real minds on the great subjects that men love to discuss in good faith.

"Your leave of absence coincided with the Revolution of July," Grossetete said, looking at Gérard in a way that asked his opinion.

"Yes," answered the engineer. "I was in Paris during the three famous days; I saw it all; I drew some disheartening conclusions."

"What were they?" M. Bonnet asked quickly.

"There is no patriotism left except under the workman's shirt," answered Gérard. "Therein lies the ruin of France. The Revolution of July is the defeat of men who are notable for birth, fortune, and talent, and a defeat in which they acquiesce. The enthusiastic zeal of the masses has gained a victory over the rich and intelligent classes, to whom zeal and enthusiasm are antipathetic."

"To judge by last year's events," added M. Clousier, "the

change is a direct encouragement to the evil which is devouring us—to Individualism. In fifty years' time every generous question will be replaced by a '*What is that to me?*' the watchword of independent opinion descended from the spiritual heights where Luther, Calvin, Zwingle, and Knox inaugurated it, till even in political economy each has a right to his own opinion. *Each for himself! Let each man mind his own business!*—these two terrible phrases, together with *What is that to me?* complete a trinity of doctrine for the bourgeoisie and the peasant proprietors. This egoism is the result of defects in our civil legislation, somewhat too hastily accomplished in the first instance, and now confirmed by the terrible consecration of the Revolution of July."

The justice relapsed into his wonted silence again with this speech, which gave the guests plenty to think over. Then M. Bonnet ventured yet further, encouraged by Clousier's remarks, and by a glance exchanged between Gérard and Grossetete.

"Good King Charles X.," said he, "has just failed in the most provident and salutary enterprise that king ever undertook for the happiness of a nation intrusted to him. The Church should be proud of the share she had in his councils. But it was the heart and brain of the upper classes which failed him, as they had failed before over the great question of the law with regard to the succession of the eldest son, the eternal honor of the one bold statesman of the Restoration—the Comte de Peyronnet. To reconstruct the nation on the basis of the family, to deprive the press of its power to do harm without restricting its usefulness, to confine the elective chamber to the functions for which it was really intended, to give back to religion its influence over the people—such were the four cardinal points of the domestic policy of the House of Bourbon. Well, in twenty years' time all France will see the necessity of that great and salutary course. King Charles X. was, moreover, more insecure in the position which he decided to quit than in the position in which his paternal authority came to an end. The future

history of our fair country, when everything shall be periodically called in question, when ceaseless discussion shall take the place of action, when the press shall become the sovereign power and the tool of the basest ambitions, will prove the wisdom of the king who has just taken with him the real principles of government. History will render to him his due for the courage with which he withstood his best friends, when once he had probed the wound, seen its extent, and the pressing necessity for the treatment, which has not been continued by those for whom he threw himself into the breach."

"Well, M. le Curé, you go straight to the point without the slightest disguise," cried M. Gérard, "but I do not say nay. When Napoleon made his Russian campaign he was forty years ahead of his age; he was misunderstood. Russia and England, in 1830, can explain the campaign of 1812. Charles X. was in the same unfortunate position; twenty-five years hence his ordinances may perhaps become law."

"France, too eloquent a country not to babble, too vainglorious to recognize real ability, in spite of the sublime good sense of her language and the mass of her people, is the very last country in which to introduce the system of two deliberating chambers," the justice of the peace remarked. "At any rate, not without the admirable safeguards against these elements in the national character, devised by Napoleon's experience. The representative system may work in a country like England, where its action is circumscribed by the nature of the soil; but the right of primogeniture, as applied to real estate, is a necessary part of it; without this factor, the representative system becomes sheer nonsense. England owes its existence to the quasi-feudal law which transmitted the house and lands to the oldest son. Russia is firmly seated on the feudal system of autocracy. For these reasons, both nations at the present day are making alarming progress. Austria could not have resisted our invasions as she did, nor declared a second war against Napoleon, had it not been for the law of primogeniture, which

preserves the strength of the family and maintains production on the large scale necessary to the State. The House of Bourbon, conscious that Liberalism had relegated France to the rank of a third-rate power in Europe, determined to regain and keep their place, and the country shook off the Bourbons when they had all but saved the country. I do not know how deep the present state of things will sink us."

"If there should be a war," cried Grossetete, "France will be without horses, as Napoleon was in 1813, when he was reduced to the resources of France alone, and could not make use of the victories of Lutzen and Bautzen, and was crushed at Leipsic! If peace continues, the evil will grow worse: twenty years hence, the number of horned cattle and horses in France will be diminished by one-half."

"M. Grossetete is right," said Gérard.—"So the work which you have decided to attempt here is a service done to your country, madame," he added, turning to Véronique.

"Yes," said the justice of the peace, "because Mme. Graslin has but one son. But will this chance in the succession repeat itself? For a certain time, let us hope, the great and magnificent scheme of cultivation which you are to carry into effect will be in the hands of one owner, and therefore will continue to provide grazing land for horses and cattle. But, in spite of all, a day will come when forest and field will be either divided up or sold in lots. Division and subdivision will follow, until the six thousand acres of plain will count ten or twelve hundred owners; and when that time comes, there will be no more horses nor prize cattle."

"Oh! when that time comes—" said the mayor.

"There is a *What is that to me?*" cried M. Grossetete, "and M. Clousier sounded the signal for it; he is caught in the act.—But, monsieur," the banker went on gravely, addressing the bewildered mayor, "the time *has* come! Round about Paris, for a ten-league radius, the land is divided up into little patches that will hardly pasture sufficient milch cows. The commune of Argenteuil numbers thirty-eight

thousand eight hundred and eighty-five plots of land, a good many of them bringing in less than fifteen centimes a year! If it were not for high farming and manure from Paris, which gives heavy crops of fodder of different kinds, I do not know how cow-keepers and dairymen would manage. As it is, the animals are peculiarly subject to inflammatory diseases consequent on the heating diet and confinement to cowsheds. They wear out their cows round about Paris just as they wear out horses in the streets. Then market-gardens, orchards, nurseries, and vineyards pay so much better than pasture that the grazing land is gradually diminishing. A few years more, and milk will be sent in by express to Paris, like salt fish, and what is going on round Paris is happening also about all large towns. The evils of the minute subdivision of landed property are extending round a hundred French cities; some day all France will be eaten up by them.

"In 1800, according to Chaptal, there were about five million acres of vineyard; exact statistics would show fully five times as much to-day. When Normandy is split up into an infinitude of small holdings, by our system of inheritance fifty per cent of the horse and cattle trade there will fall off; still Normandy will have the monopoly of the Paris milk trade, for luckily the climate will not permit vine culture. Another curious thing to notice is the steady rise in the price of butcher's-meat. In 1814, prices ranged from seven to eleven sous per pound; in 1850, twenty years hence, Paris will pay twenty sous, unless some genius is raised up to carry out the theories of Charles X."

"You have pointed out the greatest evil in France," said the justice of the peace. "The cause of it lies in the chapter *Des Successions* in the Civil Code, wherein the equal division of real estate among the children of the family is required. That is the pestle which is constantly grinding the country to powder, gives to every one but a life-interest in property which cannot remain as it is after his death. A continuous process of decomposition (for the reverse process is never set up) will end by ruining France. The French Revolution

generated a deadly virus, and the Days of July have set the poison working afresh; this dangerous germ of disease is the acquisition of land by peasants. If the chapter *Des Successions* is the origin of the evil, it is through the peasant that it reaches its worst phase. The peasant never relinquishes the land he has won. Let a bit of land once get between the ogre's ever-hungry jaws, he divides and subdivides it till there are but strips of three furrows left. Nay, even there he does not stop! he will divide the three furrows in lengths. The commune of Argenteuil, which M. Grossetete instanced just now, is a case in point. The preposterous value which the peasants set on the smallest scraps of land makes it quite impossible to reconstruct an estate. The law and procedure are made a dead letter at once by this division, and ownership is reduced to absurdity. But it is a comparatively trifling matter that the minute subdivision of the law should paralyze the treasury and the law by making it impossible to carry out its wisest regulations. There are far greater evils than even these. There are actually landlords of property bringing in fifteen and twenty centimes per annum!

"Monsieur has just said something about the falling off of cattle and horses," Clousier continued, looking at Grossetete; "the system of inheritance counts for much in that matter. The peasant proprietor keeps cows, and cows only, because milk enters into his diet; he sells the calves; he even sells butter. He has no mind to raise oxen, still less to breed horses; he has only just sufficient fodder for a year's consumption; and when a dry spring comes and hay is scarce, he is forced to take his cow to market; he cannot afford to keep her. If it should fall out so unluckily that two bad hay harvests came in succession, you would see some strange fluctuations in the price of beef in Paris, and, above all, in veal, when the third year came."

"And how would they do for 'patriotic banquets' then?" asked the doctor, smiling.

"Ah!" exclaimed Mme. Graslin, glancing at Roubaud,

"so even here, as everywhere else, politics must be served up with journalistic 'items.' "

"In this bad business the bourgeoisie play the part of American pioneers," continued Clousier. "They buy up the large estates, too large for the peasant to meddle with, and divide them. After the bulk has been cut up and triturated, a forced sale or an ordinary sale in lots hands it over sooner or later to the peasant. Everything nowadays is reduced to figures, and I know of none more eloquent than these:—

"France possesses forty-nine million *hectares* of land, for the sake of convenience, let us say forty, deducting something for roads and highroads, dunes, canals, land out of cultivation, and wastes like the plain of Montégnac, which need capital. Now, out of forty million *hectares* to a population of thirty-two millions, there are a hundred and twenty-five million parcels of land, according to the land-tax returns. I have not taken the fractions into account. So we have outrun the agrarian law, and yet neither poverty nor discord are at an end. Then the next thing will be that those who are turning the land into crumbs and diminishing the output of produce will find mouthpieces for the cry that true social justice only permits the usufruct of the land to each. They will say that ownership in perpetuity is robbery. The Saint-Simonians have begun already."

"There spoke the magistrate," said Grossetete, "and this is what the banker adds to his bold reflections. When landed property became tenable by peasants and small shopkeepers, a great wrong was done to France, though the Government does not so much as suspect it. Suppose that we set down the whole mass of the peasants at three million families, after deducting the paupers. Those families all belong to the wage-earning class. Their wages are paid in money instead of in kind—"

"There is another immense blunder in our legislation," Clousier cried, breaking in on the banker. "In 1790 it might still have been possible to pass a law empowering

employers to pay wages in kind, but now—to introduce such a measure would be to risk a Revolution."

"In this way," Grossetete continued, "the money of the country passes into the pockets of the proletariat. Now, the peasant has one passion, one desire, one determination, one aim in life—to die a landed proprietor. This desire, as M. Clousier has very clearly shown, is one result of the Revolution—a direct consequence of the sale of the national lands. Only those who have no idea of the state of things in country districts could refuse to admit that each of those three million families annually buries fifty francs as a regular thing, and in this way a hundred and fifty millions of francs are withdrawn from circulation every year. The science of political economy has reduced to an axiom the statement that a five-franc piece, if it passes through a hundred hands in the course of a day, does duty for five hundred francs. Now, it is certain for some of us old observers of the state of things in country districts that the peasant fixes his eyes on a bit of land, keeps ready to pounce upon it, and bides his time—meanwhile he never invests his capital. The intervals in the peasant's land-purchases should, therefore, be reckoned at periods of seven years. For seven years, consequently, a capital of eleven hundred million francs is lying idle in the peasants' hands; and as the lower middle classes do the same thing to quite the same extent, and behave in the same way with regard to land on too large a scale for the peasant to nibble at, in forty-two years France loses the interest on two milliards of francs at least—that is to say, on something like a hundred millions every seven years, or six hundred millions in forty-two years. But this is not the only loss. France has failed to create the worth of six hundred millions in agricultural or industrial produce. And this failure to produce may be taken as a loss of twelve hundred million francs; for if the market price of a product were not double the actual cost of production, commerce would be at a standstill. The proletariat deprives itself of six hundred million francs of wages. These six hundred

millions of initial loss that represent, for an economist, twelve hundred millions of loss of benefit derived from circulation, explain how it is that our commerce, shipping trade, and agriculture compare so badly with the state of things in England. In spite of the differences between the two countries (a good two-thirds of them, moreover, in our favor), England could mount our cavalry twice over, and every one there eats meat. But then, under the English system of land-tenure, it is almost impossible for the working classes to buy land, and so all the money is kept in constant circulation. So besides the evils of the comminution of the land, and the decay of the trade in cattle, horses, and sheep, the chapter *Des Successions* costs us a further loss of six hundred million francs of interest on the capital buried by the peasants and tradespeople, or twelve hundred million francs' worth of produce (at the least)—that is to say, a total loss of three milliards of francs withdrawn from circulation every half-century."

"The moral effect is worse than the material effect!" cried the curé. "We are turning the peasantry into pauper landowners, and half educating the lower middle classes. It will not be long before the canker of *Each for himself! Let each mind his own business!* which did its work last July among the upper classes will spread to the middle classes. A proletariat of hardened materialists, knowing no God but envy, no zeal but the despair of hunger, with no faith nor belief left, will come to the front, and trample the heart of the country underfoot. The foreigner, waxing great under a monarchical government, will find us under the shadow of royalty without the reality of a king, without law under the cover of legality, owners of property but not proprietors, with the right of election but without a government, listless holders of free and independent opinions, equal but equally unfortunate. Let us hope that between now and then God will raise up in France the man for the time, one of those elect who breathe a new spirit into a nation, a man who, whether he is a Scylla or a Marius, whether he comes

from the heights or rises from the depths, will reconstruct society."

"The first thing to do will be to send him to the Assizes or to the police court," said Gérard. "The judgment of Socrates or of Christ will be given to him, here in 1831, as of old in Attica and at Jerusalem. To-day, as of old, jealous mediocrity allows the thinker to starve. If the great political physicians who have studied the diseases of France, and are opposed to the spirit of the age, should resist to the starvation-point, we ridicule them and treat them as visionaries. Here in France we revolt against the sovereign thinker, the great man of the future, just as we rise in revolt against the political sovereign."

"But in those old times the Sophists had a very limited audience," cried the justice of the peace; "while to-day, through the medium of the periodical press, they can lead a whole nation astray; and the press which pleads for common-sense finds no echo!"

The mayor looked at M. Clousier with intense astonishment. Mme. Graslin, delighted to find a simple justice of the peace interested in such grave problems, turned to her neighbor M. Roubaud with, "Do you know M. Clousier?"

"Not till to-day! Madame, you are working miracles," he added in her ear. "And yet look at his forehead, how finely shaped it is! It is like the classical or traditional brow that sculptors gave to Lycurgus and the wise men of Greece, is it not?—Clearly there was an impolitic side to the Revolution of July," he added aloud, after going through Grossetete's reasonings. He had been a medical student, and perhaps would have lent a hand at a barricade.

"'Twas trebly impolitic," said Clousier. "We have concluded the case for law and finance, now for the Government. The Royal power, weakened by the dogma of the national sovereignty, in virtue of which the election was made on the 9th of August, 1830, will strive to overcome its rival, a principle which gives the people the right of changing a dynasty every time they fail to apprehend the intentions of their

king; so there is a domestic struggle before us which will check progress in France for a long while yet.

"England has wisely steered clear of all these sunken rocks," said Gérard. "I have been in England. I admire the hive which sends swarms over the globe to settle and civilize. In England political debate is a comedy intended to satisfy the people and to hide the action of authority which moves untrammelled in its lofty sphere; election there, is not, as in France, the referring of a question to a stupid bourgeoisie. If the land were divided up, England would cease to exist at once. The great landowners and the lords control the machinery of Government. They have a navy which takes possession of whole quarters of the globe (and under the very eyes of Europe) to fulfil the exigencies of their trade, and form colonies for the discontented and unsatisfactory. Instead of waging war on men of ability, annihilating and underrating them, the English aristocracy continually seeks them out, rewards and assimilates them. The English are prompt to act in all that concerns the Government, and in the choice of men and material, while with us action of any kind is slow; and yet they are slow, and we impatient. Capital with them is adventurous, and always moving; with us it is shy and suspicious. Here is corroboration of M. Grossetete's statements about the loss to industry of the peasants' capital; I can sketch the difference in a few words. English capital, which is constantly circulating, has created ten milliards of wealth in the shape of expanded manufactures and joint-stock companies paying dividends; while here in France, though we have more capital, it has not yielded one-tenth part of the profit."

"It is all the more extraordinary," said Roubaud, "since that they are lymphatic, and we are generally either sanguine or nervous."

"Here is a great problem for you to study, monsieur," said Clousier. "Given a national temperament, to find the institutions best adapted to counteract it. Truly, Cromwell was a great legislator. He, one man, made England what

she is by promulgating the *Act of Navigation*, which made the English the enemy of all other nations, and infused into them a fierce pride, that has served them as a lever. But in spite of their garrison at Malta, as soon as France and Russia fully understand the part to be played in politics by the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, the discovery of a new route to Asia by way of Egypt or the Euphrates valley will be a deathblow to England, just as the discovery of the Cape of Good Hope was the ruin of Venice."

"And nothing of God in all this!" cried the curé. "M. Clousier and M. Roubaud are indifferent in matters of religion . . . and you, monsieur?" he asked questioningly, turning to Gérard.

"A Protestant," said Grossetete.

"You guessed rightly!" exclaimed Véronique, with a glance at the cure as she offered her hand to Clousier to return to her apartments.

All prejudices excited by M. Gérard's appearance quickly vanished, and the three notables of Montégnac congratulated themselves on such an acquisition.

"Unluckily," said M. Bonnet, "there is a cause for antagonism between Russia and the Catholic countries on the shores of the Mediterranean; a schism of little real importance divides the Greek Church from the Latin, for the great misfortune of humanity."

"Each preaches for his saint," said Mme. Graslin, smiling. "M. Grossetete thinks of lost milliards; M. Clousier of law in confusion; the doctor sees in legislation a question of temperaments; M. le Curé sees in religion an obstacle in the way of a good understanding between France and Russia."

"Please add, madame," said Gérard, "that in the sequestration of capital by the peasant and small tradesman, I see the delay of the completion of railways in France—"

"Then what would you have?" asked she.

"Oh! The admirable Councillors of State who devised laws in the time of the Emperor and the *Corps législatif*,

when those who had brains as well as those who had property had a voice in the election, a body whose sole function it was to oppose unwise laws or capricious wars. The present Chamber of Deputies is like to end, as you will see, by becoming the governing body, and legalized anarchy it will be."

"Great heavens!" cried the curé in an access of lofty patriotism, "how is it that minds so enlightened"—he indicated Clousier, Roubaud, and Gérard—"see the evil, and point out the remedy, and do not begin by applying it to themselves? All of you represent the classes attacked; all of you recognize the necessity of passive obedience on the part of the great masses in the State, an obedience like that of the soldier in time of war; all of you desire the unity of authority, and wish that it shall never be called in question. But that consolidation to which England has attained through the development of pride and material interests (which are a sort of belief) can only be attained here by sentiments induced by Catholicism, and you are not Catholics! I the priest drop my character, and reason with rationalists.

"How can you expect the masses to become religious and to obey if they see irreligion and relaxed discipline around them? A people united by any faith will easily get the better of men without belief. The law of the interest of all, which underlies patriotism, is at once annulled by the law of individual interest, which authorizes and implants selfishness. Nothing is solid and durable but that which is natural, and the natural basis of politics is the family. The family should be the basis of all institutions. A universal effect denotes a coextensive cause. These things that you notice proceed from the social principle itself, which has no force, because it is based on independent opinion, and the right of private judgment is the forerunner of individualism. There is less wisdom in looking for the blessing of security from the intelligence and capacity of the majority than in depending upon the intelligence of institutions and the capacity of one single man for the blessing of security. It

is easier to find wisdom in one man than in a whole nation. The peoples have but a blind heart to guide them; they feel, but they do not see. A government must see, and must not be swayed by sentiments. There is therefore an evident contradiction between the first impulses of the masses and the action of authority which must direct their energy and give it unity. To find a great prince is a great chance (to use your language), but to trust your destinies to any assembly of men, even if they are honest, is madness.

"France is mad at this moment! Alas! you are as thoroughly convinced of this as I. If all men who really believe what they say, as you do, would set the example in their own circle; if every intelligent thinker would set his hand to raising once more the altars of the great spiritual republic, of the one Church which has directed humanity, we might see once more in France the miracles wrought there by our fathers."

"What would you have, M. le Curé?" said Gérard, "if one must speak to you as in the confessional—I look on faith as a lie which you consciously tell yourself, on hope as a lie about the future, and on this charity of yours as a child's trick; one is a good boy, for the sake of the jam."

"And yet, monsieur, when hope rocks us we sleep well," said Mme. Graslin.

Roubaud, who was about to speak, supported by a glance from Grossetete and the curé, stopped short at the words.

"Is it any fault of ours," said Clousier, "if Jesus Christ had not time to formulate a system of government in accordance with His teaching, as Moses did and Confucius—the two greatest legislators whom the world has seen, for the Jews and the Chinese still maintain their national existence, though the first are scattered all over the earth, and the second an isolated people?"

"Ah! you are giving me a task indeed," said the curé candidly, "but I shall triumph, I shall convert all of you. . . . You are nearer the Faith than you think. Truth lurks beneath the lie; come forward but a step, and you return!"

And with this cry from the curé the conversation took a fresh direction.

The next morning before M. Grossetete went, he promised to take an active share in Véronique's schemes so soon as they should be judged practicable. Mme. Graslin and Gérard rode beside his travelling carriage as far as the point where the crossroad joined the highroad from Bordeaux to Lyons. Gérard was so eager to see the place, and Véronique so anxious to show it to him, that this ride had been planned overnight. After they took leave of the kind old man, they galloped down into the great plain and skirted the hillsides that lay between the chateau and the Living Rock. The surveyor recognized the rock embankment which Farrabesche had pointed out; it stood up like the lowest course of masonry under the foundations of the hills, in such a sort that when the bed of this indestructible canal of nature's making should be cleared out, and the watercourses regulated so as not to choke it, irrigation would actually be facilitated by that long channel which lay about ten feet above the surface of the plain. The first thing to be done was to estimate the volume of water in the Gabou, and to make certain that the sides of the valley could hold it; no decision could be made till this was known.

Véronique gave a horse to Farrabesche, who was to accompany Gérard and acquaint him with the least details which he himself had observed. After some days of consideration Gérard thought the base of either parallel chains of hill solid enough (albeit of different material) to hold the water.

In the January of the following year, a wet season, Gérard calculated the probable amount of water discharged by the Gabou, and found that when the three watercourses had been diverted into the torrent, the total amount would be sufficient to water an area three times as great as the plain of Montégnac. The dams across the Gabou, the masonry and engineering works needed to bring the water-supply of the three little valleys into the plain, should not cost more

than sixty thousand francs; for the surveyor discovered a quantity of chalky deposit on the common, so that lime would be cheap, and the forest being so near at hand, stone and timber would cost nothing even for transport. All the preparations could be made before the Gabou ran dry, so that when the important work should be begun it should quickly be finished. But the plain was another matter. Gérard considered that there the first preparation would cost at least two hundred thousand francs, sowing and planting apart.

The plain was to be divided into four squares of two hundred and fifty acres each. There was no question of breaking up the waste; the first thing to do was to remove the largest flints. Navvies would be employed to dig a great number of trenches and to line the channels with stone to keep the water in, for the water must be made to flow or to stand as required. All this work called for active, devoted, and painstaking workers. Chance so ordered it that the plain was a straightforward piece of work, a level stretch, and the water with a ten-foot fall could be distributed at will. There was nothing to prevent the finest results in farming the land; here there might be just such a splendid green carpet as in North Italy, a source of wealth and of pride to Lombardy. Gérard sent to his late district for an old and experienced foreman, Fresquin by name.

Mme. Graslin, therefore, wrote to ask Grossetete to negotiate for her a loan of two hundred and fifty thousand francs on the security of her Government stock; the interest of six years, Gérard calculated, should pay off the debt, capital and interest. The loan was concluded in the course of the month of March; and by that time Gérard, with Fresquin's assistance, had finished all the preliminary operations, levelling, boring, observations, and estimates. The news of the great scheme had spread through the country and roused the poor people; and the indefatigable Farrabesche, Colorat, Clousier, Roubaud, and the Mayor of Montégnac, all those, in fact, who were interested in the enterprise for its own sake or for

Mme. Graslin's, chose the workers or gave the names of the poor who deserved to be employed.

Gérard bought partly for M. Grossetete, partly on his own account, some thousand acres of land on the other side of the road through Montégnac. Fresquin, his foreman, also took five hundred acres, and sent for his wife and children.

In the early days of April, 1833, M. Grossetete came to Montégnac to see the land purchased for him by Gérard; but the principal motive of his journey was the arrival of Catherine Curieux. She had come by the diligence from Paris to Limoges, and Mme. Graslin was expecting her. Grossetete found Mme. Graslin about to start for the church. M. Bonnet was to say a mass to ask the blessing of Heaven on the work about to begin. All the men, women, and children were present.

M. Grossetete brought forward a woman of thirty or thereabout, who looked weak and out of health. "Here is your protégé," he said, addressing Véronique.

"Are you Catherine Curieux?" Mme. Graslin asked.

"Yes, madame."

For a moment Véronique looked at her; Catherine was rather tall, shapely, and pale; the exceeding sweetness of her features was not belied by the beautiful soft gray eyes. In the shape of her face and the outlines of her forehead there was a nobleness, a sort of grave and simple majesty, sometimes seen in very young girls' faces in the country, a kind of flower of beauty, which field work, and the constant wear of household cares, and sunburn, and neglect of appearance, wither with alarming rapidity. From her attitude as she stood it was easy to discern that she would move with the ease of a daughter of the fields and something of an added grace, unconsciously learned in Paris. If Catherine had never left the Corrèze, she would no doubt have been by this time a wrinkled and withered woman, the bright tints in her face would have grown hard; but Paris, which had toned down the high color, had preserved her beauty; and ill-health, weariness, and sorrow had given to her the mysteri-

ous gifts of melancholy and of that inner life of thought denied to poor toilers in the field who lead an almost animal existence. Her dress likewise marked a distinction between her and the peasants; for it abundantly displayed the Parisian taste which even the least coquettish women are so quick to acquire. Catherine Curieux, not knowing what might await her, and unable to judge the lady in whose presence she stood, seemed somewhat embarrassed.

"Do you still love Farrabesche?" asked Mme. Graslin, when Grossetete left the two women together for a moment.

"Yes, madame," she answered, flushing red.

"But if you sent him a thousand francs while he was in prison, why did you not come to him when he came out? Do you feel any repugnance for him? Speak to me as you would to your own mother. Were you afraid that he had gone utterly to the bad? that he cared for you no longer?"

"No, madame; but I can neither read nor write. I was living with a very exacting old lady; she fell ill; we sat up with her of a night, and I had to nurse her. I knew the time was coming near when Jacques would be out of prison, but I could not leave Paris until the lady died. She left me nothing, after all my devotion to her and her interests. I had made myself ill with sitting up with her and the hard work of nursing, and I wanted to get well again before I came back. I spent all my savings, and then I made up my mind to go into the Hôpital Saint-Louis, and have just been discharged as cured."

Mme. Graslin was touched by an explanation so simple.

"Well, but, my dear," she said, "tell me why you left your people so suddenly? What made you leave your child? Why did you not send them news of you, or get some one to write—"

For all answer, Catherine wept.

"Madame," she said at last, reassured by the pressure of Véronique's hand, "I daresay I was wrong, but it was more than I could do to stop in the place. It was not that I felt

that I had done wrong; it was the rest of them; I was afraid of their gossip and talk. So long as Jacques was here in danger, he could not do without me; but when he was gone, I felt as if I could not stop. There was I, a girl with a child and no husband! The lowest creature would have been better than I. If I had heard them say the least word about Benjamin or his father, I do not know what I should have done. I should have killed myself perhaps, or gone out of my mind. My own father or mother might have said something hasty in a moment of anger. Meek as I am, I am too irritable to bear hasty words or insult. I have been well punished; I could not see my child, and never a day passed but I thought of him! I wanted to be forgotten, and forgotten I am. Nobody has given me a thought. They thought I was dead, and yet many and many a time I felt I could like to leave everything to have one day here and see my little boy—"

"Your little boy—see, Catherine, here he is!"

Catherine looked up and saw Benjamin, and something like a feverish shiver ran through her.

"Benjamin," said Mme. Graslin, "come and kiss your mother."

"My mother?" cried Benjamin in amazement. He flung his arms round Catherine's neck, and she clasped him to her with wild energy. But the boy escaped, and ran away crying, "I will find *him!*"

Mme. Graslin, seeing that Catherine's strength was failing, made her sit down; and as she did so her eyes met M. Bonnet's look, her color rose, for in that keen glance her confessor read her heart. She spoke tremulously.

"I hope, M. le Curé," she said, "that you will marry Catherine and Farrabesche at once.—Do you not remember M. Bonnet, my child? He will tell you that Farrabesche has behaved himself like an honest man since he came back. Every one in the countryside respects him; if there is a place in the world where you may live happily with the good opinion of every one about you, it is here in Montégnac. With God's will, you will make your fortune here, for

you shall be my tenants. Farrabesche has all his citizen's rights again."

"This is all true, my daughter," said the curé.

As he spoke, Farrabesche came in, led by his eager son. Face to face with Catherine in Mme. Graslin's presence, his face grew white, and he was mute. He saw how active the kindness of the one had been for him, and guessed all that the other had suffered in her enforced absence. Véronique turned to go with M. Bonnet, and the curé for his part wished to take Véronique aside. As soon as they were out of hearing, Véronique's confessor looked full at her and saw her color rise; she lowered her eyes like a guilty creature.

"You are degrading charity," he said severely.

"And how?" she asked, raising her head.

"Charity," said M. Bonnet, "is a passion as far greater than love, as humanity, madame, is greater than one human creature. All this is not the spontaneous work of disinterested virtue. You are falling from the grandeur of the service of man to the service of a single creature. In your kindness to Catherine and Farrabesche there is an alloy of memories and after-thoughts which spoils it in the sight of God. Pluck out the rest of the dart of the spirit of evil from your heart. Do not spoil the value of your good deeds in this way. Will you ever attain at last to that holy ignorance of the good that you do, which is the supreme grace of man's actions?"

Mme. Graslin turned away to dry her eyes. Her tears told the curé that his words had reached and probed some unhealed wound in her heart. Farrabesche, Catherine, and Benjamin came to thank their benefactress, but she made a sign to them to go away and leave her with M. Bonnet.

"You see how I have hurt them," she said, bidding him see their disappointed faces. And the tender-hearted curé beckoned to them to come back.

"You must be completely happy," she said.—"Here is the patent which gives you back all your rights as a citizen, and exempts you from the old humiliating formalities," she

added, holding out to Farrabesche a paper which she had kept. Farrabesche kissed Véronique's hand. There was an expression of submissive affection and quiet devotion in his eyes, the devotion which nothing could change, the fidelity of a dog for his master.

"If Jacques has suffered much, madame, I hope that it will be possible for me to make up to him in happiness for the trouble he has been through," said Catherine; "for whatever he may have done, he is not bad."

Mme. Graslin turned away her head. The sight of their happiness seemed to crush her. M. Bonnet left her to go to the church, and she dragged herself thither on M. Grossetête's arm.

After breakfast, every one went to see the work begun. All the old people of Montégnac were likewise present. Véronique stood between M. Grossetete and M. Bonnet on the top of the steep slope which the new road ascended, whence they could see the alignment of the four new roads, which served as a deposit for the stones taken off the land. Five navvies were clearing a space of eighteen feet (the width of each road), and throwing up a sort of embankment of good soil as they worked. Four men on either side were engaged in making a ditch, and these also made a bank of fertile earth along the edge of the field. Behind them came two men, who dug holes at intervals, and planted trees. In each division, thirty laborers (chosen from among the poor), twenty women, and forty girls and children, eighty-six workers in all, were busy piling up the stones which the workmen riddled out along the bank so as to measure the quantity produced by each group. In this way all went abreast, and with such picked and enthusiastic workers rapid progress was being made. Grossetete promised to send some trees, and to ask for more, among Mme. Graslin's friends. It was evident that there would not be enough in the nursery plantations at the chateau to supply such a demand.

Toward the end of the day, which was to finish with a

great dinner at the chateau, Farrabesche begged to speak with Mme. Graslin for a moment. Catherine came with him.

"Madame," he said, "you were so kind as to promise me the home farm. You meant to help me to a fortune when you granted me such a favor, but I have come round to Catherine's ideas about our future. If I did well there, there would be jealousy; a word is soon said; I might find things unpleasant, I am afraid, and besides, Catherine would never feel comfortable; it would be better for us to keep to ourselves, in fact. So I have come just to ask you if you will give us the land about the mouth of the Gabou, near the common, to farm instead, and a little bit of the wood yonder under the Living Rock. You will have a lot of workmen thereabout in July, and it would be easy then to build a farmhouse on a knoll in a good situation. We should be very happy. I would send for Guépin, poor fellow, when he comes out of prison; he would work like a horse, and it is likely I might find a wife for him. My man is no do-nothing. No one will come up there to stare at us; we will colonize that bit of land, and it will be my great ambition to make a famous farm for you there. Besides, I have come to suggest a tenant for your great farm —a cousin of Catherine's, who has a little money of his own; he will be better able than I to look after such a big concern as that. In five years' time, please God, you will have five or six thousand head of cattle or horses down there in the plain that they are breaking up, and it will really take a good head to look after it all."

Mme. Graslin recognized the good sense of Farrabesche's request, and granted it.

As soon as a beginning was made in the plain, Mme. Graslin fell into the even ways of a country life. She went to mass in the morning, watched over the education of the son whom she idolized, and went to see her workmen. After dinner she was at home to her friends in the little drawing-room on the first floor of the centre tower.

She taught Roubaud, Clousier, and the curé whist—Gérard knew the game already—and when the party broke up toward nine o'clock, every one went home. The only events in the pleasant life were the successes of the different parts of the great enterprise.

June came, the bed of the Gabou was dry, Gérard had taken up his quarters in the old keeper's cottage; for Farrabesche's farmhouse was finished by this time, and fifty masons, returned from Paris, were building a wall across the valley from side to side. The masonry was twenty feet thick at the base, gradually sloping away to half that thickness at the top, and the whole length of it was imbedded in twelve feet of solid concrete. On the side of the valley Gérard added a course of concrete with a sloping surface twelve feet thick at the base, and a similar support on the side nearest the commons, covered with leaf-mould several feet deep, made a substantial barrier which the flood water could not break through. In case of a very wet season, Gérard contrived a channel at a suitable height for the overflow. Everywhere the masonry was carried down on the solid rock (granite, or tufa), that the water might not escape at the sides. By the middle of August the dam was finished. Meanwhile, Gérard also prepared three channels in the three principal valleys, and all of the undertakings cost less than the estimate. In this way the farm by the chateau could be put in working order.

The irrigation channels in the plain under Fresquin's superintendence corresponded with the natural canal at the base of the hills; all the water courses departed thence. The great abundance of flints enabled him to pave all the channels, and sluices were constructed so that the water might be kept at the required height in them.

Every Sunday after mass Véronique went down through the park with Gérard and the curé, the doctor, and the mayor, to see how the system of water supply was working. The winter of 1833-1834 was very wet. The water

from the three streams had been turned into the torrent, and the flood had made the valley of the Gabou into three lakes, arranged of set design one above the other, so as to form a reserve for times of great drought. In places where the valley widened out, Gérard had taken advantage of one or two knolls to make an island here and there, and to plant them with different trees. This vast engineering operation had completely altered the appearance of the landscape, but it would still be five or six years before it would take its true character.

"The land was quite naked," Farrabesche used to say, "and now madame has clothed it." After all these great changes, every one spoke of Véronique as "madame" in the countryside. When the rains ceased in June, 1834, trial was made of the irrigation system in the part of the plain where seed had been sown; and the green growth thus watered was of the same fine quality as in an Italian *marcita*, or a Swiss meadow. The method in use on farms in Lombardy had been employed; the whole surface was kept evenly moist, and the plain was as even as a carpet. The nitre in the snow, dissolved in the water, doubtless contributed not a little to the fineness of the grass. Gérard hoped that the produce would be something like that of Switzerland, where, as is well known, this substance is an inexhaustible source of riches. The trees planted along the roadsides, drawing water sufficient from the ditches, made rapid progress. So it came to pass that in 1838, five years after Mme. Graslin came to Montégnac, the waste land, condemned as sterile by twenty generations, was a green and fertile plain, the whole of it under cultivation.

Gérard had built houses for five farms, besides the large one at the chateau; Gérard's farm, like Grossetete's and Fresquin's, received the overflow from Mme. Graslin's estate; they were conducted on the same methods, and laid out on the same lines. Gérard built a charming lodge on his own property.

When all was finished, the township of Montégnac acted

on the suggestion of its mayor, who was delighted to resign his office to Gérard, and the surveyor became mayor in his stead.

In 1840 the departure of the first herd of fat cattle sent from Montégnac to the Paris markets was an occasion for a rural fête. Cattle and horses were raised on the farms in the plain; for when the ground was cleared, seven inches of mould were usually found, which were manured by pasturing cattle on them, and continually enriched by the leaves that fell every autumn from the trees, and, first and foremost, by the melted snow-water from the reservoirs in the Gabou.

It was in this year that Mme. Graslin decided that a tutor must be found for her son, now eleven years old. She was unwilling to part with him, and yet desired to make a well-educated man of her boy. M. Bonnet wrote to the seminary. Mme. Graslin, on her side, let fall a few words concerning her wishes and her difficulty to Monseigneur Dutheil, recently appointed to an archbishopric. It was a great and serious matter to make choice of a man who must spend at least nine months out of twelve at the chateau. Gérard had offered already to ground his friend Francis in mathematics, but it was impossible to do without a tutor; and this choice that she must make was the more formidable to Mme. Graslin, because she knew that her health was giving way. As the value of the land in her beloved Montégnac increased, she redoubled the secret austerities of her life.

Monseigneur Dutheil, with whom Mme. Graslin still corresponded, found her the man for whom she wished. He sent a schoolmaster named Ruffin from his own diocese. Ruffin was a young man of five-and-twenty with a genius for private teaching; he was widely read; in spite of an excessive sensibility, could, when necessary, show himself sufficiently severe for the education of a child, nor was his piety in any way prejudicial to his knowledge; finally, he was patient and pleasant-looking.

"This is a real gift which I am sending you, my dear daughter," so the Archbishop wrote; "the young man is

worthy to be the tutor of a prince, so I count upon you to secure his future, for he will be your son's spiritual father."

M. Ruffin was so much liked by Mme. Graslin's little circle of faithful friends, that his coming made no change in the various intimacies of those who grouped about their idol, seized with a sort of jealousy on the hours and moments spent with her.

The year 1843 saw the prosperity of Montégnac increasing beyond all hopes. The farm on the Gabou rivalled the farms on the plain, and the chateau led the way in all improvements. The five other farms, which by the terms of the lease paid an increasing rent, and would each bring in the sum of thirty thousand francs in twelve years' time, then brought in sixty thousand francs a year all told. The farmers were just beginning to reap the benefits of their self-denial and Mme. Graslin's sacrifices, and could afford to manure the meadows in the plain where the finest crops grew without fear of dry seasons. The Gabou farm paid its first rent of four thousand francs joyously.

It was in this year that a man in Montégnac started a *diligence* between the chief town in the arrondissement and Limoges; a coach ran either way daily. M. Clousier's nephew sold his clerkship and obtained permission to practice as a notary, and Fresquin was appointed to be tax-collector in the canton. Then the new notary built himself a pretty house in upper Montégnac, planted mulberry trees on his land, and became Gérard's deputy. And Gérard himself, grown bold with success, thought of a plan which was to bring Mme. Graslin a colossal fortune; for this year she paid off her loan, and began to receive interest from her investment in the Funds. This was Gérard's scheme: He would turn the little river into a canal, by diverting the abundant water of the Gabou into it. This canal should effect a junction with the Vienne, and in this way it would be possible to exploit twenty thousand acres of the vast forest of Montégnac. The woods were admirably superintended by Colorat,

but hitherto had brought in nothing on account of the difficulty of transport. With this arrangement it would be possible to fell a thousand acres every year (thus dividing the forest into twenty strips for successive cuttings), and the valuable timber for building purposes could be sent by water to Limoges. This had been Graslin's plan; he had scarcely listened to the curé's projects for the plain, he was far more interested in the scheme for making a canal of the little river.

V

VERONIQUE IS LAID IN THE TOMB

IN THE BEGINNING of the following year, in spite of Mme. Graslin's bearing, her friends saw warning signs that death was near. To all Roubaud's observations, as to the utmost ingenuity of the most keen-sighted questioners, Véronique gave but one answer, "She felt wonderfully well." Yet that spring, when she revisited forest and farms and her rich meadows, it was with a childlike joy that plainly spoke of sad forebodings.

Gérard had been obliged to make a low wall of concrete from the dam across the Gabou to the park at Montégnac along the base of the lower slope of the hill of the Corrèze; this had suggested an idea to him. He would inclose the whole forest of Montégnac, and throw the park into it. Mme. Graslin put by thirty thousand francs a year for this purpose. It would take seven years to complete the wall; but when it was finished, the splendid forest would be exempted from the dues claimed by the Government over uninclosed woods and lands, and the three ponds in the Gabou valley would lie within the circuit of the park. Each of the ponds, proudly dubbed "a lake," had its island. This year, too, Gérard, in concert with Grossetete, prepared a surprise for Mme. Graslin's birthday; he had built on the second and largest island a little Chartreuse—a summer-

house, satisfactorily rustic without, and perfectly elegant within. The old banker was in the plot, so were Farrabesche, Fresquin, and Clousier's nephew, and most of the well-to-do folk in Montégnac. Grossetete sent the pretty furniture. The bell tower, copied from the tower of Vevay, produced a charming effect in the landscape. Six boats (two for each lake) had been secretly built, rigged, and painted during the winter by Farrabesche and Guépin, with some help from the village carpenter at Montégnac.

So one morning in the middle of May, after Mme. Graslin's friends had breakfasted with her, they led her out into the park, which Gérard had managed for the last five years as architect and naturalist. It had been admirably laid out, sloping down toward the pleasant meadows in the Gabou valley, where below, on the first lake, two boats were in readiness for them. The meadowland, watered by several clear streams, had been taken in at the base of the great amphitheatre at the head of the Gabou valley. The woods round about them had been carefully thinned and disposed with a view to the effect; here the shapeliest masses of trees, there a charming inlet of meadow; there was an air of loneliness about the forest-surrounded space which soothed the soul.

On a bit of rising ground by the lake Gérard had carefully reproduced the chalet which all travellers see and admire on the road to Brieg through the Rhone valley. This was to be the chateau, dairy, and cowshed. From the balcony there was a view over this landscape created by the engineer's art, a view comparable, since the lakes had been made, to the loveliest Swiss scenery.

It was a glorious day. Not a cloud in the blue sky, and on the earth beneath the myriad gracious chance effects that the fair May month can give. Light wreaths of mist, risen from the lake, still hung like a thin smoke about the trees by the water's edge—willows and weeping willows, ash and alder and abeles, Lombard and Canadian poplars, white and pink hawthorn, birch and acacia, had been grouped about

the lake, as the nature of the ground and the trees themselves (all finely-grown specimens now ten years old) suggested. The high green wall of forest trees was reflected in the sheet of water, clear as a mirror and serene as the sky; their topmost crests, clearly outlined in that limpid atmosphere, stood out in contrast with the thickets below them, veiled in delicate green undergrowth. The lakes, divided by strongly-built embankments with a causeway along them that served as a short cut from side to side of the valley, lay like three mirrors, each with a different reflecting surface, the water trickling from one to another in musical cascades. And beyond this, from the chalet you caught a glimpse of the bleak and barren common lands, the pale chalky soil (seen from the balcony) looked like a wide sea, and supplied a contrast with the fresh greenery about the lake. Véronique saw the gladness in her friends' faces as their hands were held out to assist her to enter the larger boat, tears rose to her eyes, and they rowed on in silence until they reached the first causeway. Here they landed, to embark again on the second lake; and Véronique, looking up, saw the summer-house on the island, and Grossetete and his family sitting on a bench before it.

"They are determined to make me regret life, it seems," she said, turning to the curé.

"We want to keep you among us," Clousier said.

"There is no putting life into the dead," she answered; but at M. Bonnet's look of rebuke, she withdrew into herself again.

"Simply let me have the charge of your health," pleaded Roubaud in a gentle voice; "I am sure that I could preserve her who is the living glory of the canton, the common bond that unites the lives of all our friends."

Véronique bent her head, while Gérard rowed slowly out toward the island in the middle of the sheet of water, the largest of the three. The upper lake chanced to be too full; the distant murmur of the weir seemed to find a voice for the lovely landscape.

"You did well indeed to bring me here to bid farewell to this entrancing view!" she said, as she saw the beauty of the trees so full of leaves that they hid the bank on either side.

The only sign of disapprobation which Véronique's friends permitted themselves was a gloomy silence; and, at a second glance from M. Bonnet, she sprang lightly from the boat with an apparent gayety, which she sustained. Once more she became the lady of the manor, and so charming was she that the Grossetete family thought that they saw in her the beautiful Mme. Graslin of old days.

"Assuredly, you may live yet," her mother said in Véronique's ear.

On that pleasant festival day, in the midst of a scene sublimely transformed by the use of Nature's own resources, how should anything wound Véronique? Yet then and there she received her deathblow.

It had been arranged that the party should return home toward nine o'clock by way of the meadows; for the roads, quite as fine as any in England or Italy, were the pride of their engineer. There were flints in abundance; as the stones were taken off the land they had been piled in heaps by the roadside; and with such plenty of road metal it was so easy to keep the ways in good order that in five years' time they were in a manner macadamized. Carriages were waiting for the party at the lower end of the valley nearest the plain, almost under the Living Rock. The horses had all been bred in Montégnac. Their trial formed part of the programme for the day; for these were the first that were ready for sale, the manager of the stud having just sent ten of them up to the stables of the chateau. Four handsome animals in light and plain harness were to draw Mme. Graslin's calèche, a present from Grossetete.

After dinner the joyous company went to take coffee on a promontory where a little wooden kiosk had been erected, a copy of one on the shores of the Bosphorus. From this point there was a wide outlook over the lowest lake, stretch-

ing away to the great barrier across the Gabou, now covered thickly with a luxuriant growth of green, a charming spot for the eyes to rest upon. Colorat's house and the old cottage, now restored, were the only buildings in the landscape; Colorat's capacities were scarcely adequate for the difficult post of head forester in Montégnac, so he had succeeded to Farrabesche's office.

From this point Mme. Graslin fancied that she could see Francis near Farrabesche's nursery of saplings; she looked for the child, and could not find him, till M. Ruffin pointed him out, playing on the brink of the lake with M. Grossetete's great-grandchildren. Véronique felt afraid that some accident might happen, and without listening to remonstrances, sprang into one of the boats, landed on the causeway, and herself hurried away in search of her son. This little incident broke up the party on the island. Grossetete, now a venerable great-grandfather, was the first to suggest a walk along the beautiful field path that wound up and down by the side of the lower lakes.

Mme. Graslin saw Francis a long way off. He was with a woman in mourning, who had thrown her arms about him. She seemed to be from a foreign country, judging by her dress and the shape of her hat. Véronique in dismay called her son to her.

"Who is that woman?" she asked of the other children; "and why did Francis go away from you?"

"The lady called him by his name," said one of the little girls. Mme. Sauviat and Gérard, who were ahead of the others, came up at that moment.

"Who is that woman, dear?" said Mme. Graslin, turning to Francis.

"I do not know," he said, "but no one kisses me like that except you and grandmamma. She was crying," he added in his mother's ear.

"Shall I run and fetch her?" asked Gérard.

"No!" said Mme. Graslin, with a curtness very unusual with her.

With kindly tact, which Véronique appreciated, Gérard took the little ones with him and went back to meet the others; so that Mme. Sauviat, Mme. Graslin, and Francis were left together.

"What did she say to you?" asked Mme. Sauviat, addressing her grandson.

"I don't know. She did not speak French."

"Did you not understand anything she said?" asked Véronique.

"Oh, yes; one thing she said over and over again, that is how I can remember it—*dear brother!* she said."

Véronique leaned on her mother's arm and took her child's hand, but she could scarcely walk, and her strength failed her.

"What is it? . . . What has happened?" . . . every one asked of Mme. Sauviat.

A cry broke from the old Auvergnate: "Oh! my daughter is in danger!" she exclaimed, in her guttural accent and deep voice.

Mme. Graslin had to be carried to her carriage. She ordered Aline to keep beside Francis, and beckoned to Gérard.

"You have been in England, I believe," she said, when she had recovered herself; "do you understand English? What do these words mean—*dear brother?*"

"That is very simple," said Gérard, and he explained.

Véronique exchanged glances with Aline and Mme. Sauviat; the two women shuddered, but controlled their feelings. Mme. Graslin sank into a torpor from which nothing roused her; she did not heed the gleeful voices as the carriages started, nor the splendor of the sunset light on the meadows, the even pace of the horses, nor the laughter of the friends who followed them on horseback at a gallop. Her mother bade the man drive faster, and her carriage was the first to reach the chateau. When the rest arrived they were told that Véronique had gone to her room, and would see no one.

"I am afraid that Mme. Graslin must have received a fatal wound," Gérard began, speaking to his friends.

"Where? . . . How?" asked they.

"In the heart," answered Gérard.

Two days later Roubaud set out for Paris. He had seen that Mme. Graslin's life was in danger, and to save her he had gone to summon the first doctor in Paris to give his opinion of the case. But Véronique had only consented to see Roubaud to put an end to the importunities of Aline and her mother, who begged her to be more careful of herself; she knew that she was dying. She declined to see M. Bonnet, saying that the time had not yet come, and although all the friends who had come from Limoges for her birthday festival were anxious to stay with her, she entreated them to pardon her if she could not fulfil the duties of hospitality, but she needed the most profound solitude. So, after Roubaud's sudden departure, the guests left the chateau of Montégnac and went back to Limoges, not so much in disappointment as in despair, for all who had come with Grossetete adored Véronique, and were utterly at a loss as to the cause of this mysterious disaster.

One evening, two days after Grossetete's large family party had left the chateau, Aline brought a visitor to Mme. Graslin's room. It was Catherine Farrabesche. At first Catherine stood glued to the spot, so astonished was she at this sudden change in her mistress, the features so drawn.

"Good God! madame, what harm that poor girl has done! If only we could have known, Farrabesche and I, we would never have taken her in. She has just heard that madame is ill, and sent me to tell Mme. Sauviat that she should like to speak to her."

"*Here!*" cried Véronique. "Where is she at this moment?"

"My husband took her over to the chalet."

"Good," said Mme. Graslin; "leave us, and tell Farrabesche to go. Tell the lady to wait, and my mother will go to see her."

At nightfall Véronique, leaning on her mother's arm, crept slowly across the park to the chalet. The moon shone with its most brilliant glory, the night air was soft; the two women, both shaken with emotion that they could not conceal, received in some sort the encouragement of Nature. From moment to moment Mme. Sauviat stopped and made her daughter rest; for Véronique's sufferings were so poignant that it was nearly midnight before they reached the path that turned down through the wood to the meadows, where the chalet roof sparkled like silver. The moonlight on the surface of the still water lent it a pearly hue. The faint noises of the night, which travel so far in the silence, made up a delicate harmony of sound.

Véronique sat down on the bench outside the chalet in the midst of the glorious spectacle beneath the starry skies. The murmur of two voices and footfalls on the sands made by two persons still some distance away was borne to her by the water, which transmits every sound in the stillness as faithfully as it reflects everything in its calm surface. There was an exquisite quality in the intonation of one of the voices, by which Véronique recognized the curé, and with the rustle of his cassock was blended the light sound of a silk dress. Evidently there was a woman.

"Let us go in," she said to her mother. Mme. Sauviat and Véronique sat down on a manger in the low, large room built for a cowshed.

"I am not blaming you at all, my child," the curé was saying; "but you may be the cause of an irreparable misfortune, for she is the life and soul of this countryside."

"Oh, monsieur! I will go to-night," the stranger woman's voice answered; "but—I can say this to you—it will be like death to me to leave my country a second time. If I had stayed a day longer in that horrible New York or in the United States, where there is neither hope nor faith nor charity, I should have died, without any illness. The air I was breathing hurt my chest, the food did me no good, I was dying though I looked full of life and

health. When I stepped on board the suffering ceased; I felt as if I were in France. Ah, monsieur! I have seen my mother and my brother's wife die of grief. And then my grandfather and grandmother Tascheron died — died, dear M. Bonnet, in spite of the unheard-of prosperity of Tascheronville. . . . Yes. Our father began a settlement, a village in Ohio, and now the village is almost a town. One-third of the land thereabout belongs to our family, for God has watched over us all along, and the farms have done well, our crops are magnificent, and we are rich—so rich that we managed to build a Catholic church. The whole town is Catholic; we will not allow any other worship, and we hope to convert all the endless sects about us by our example. The true faith is in a minority in that dreary mercenary land of the dollar, a land which chills one to the soul. Still I would go back to die there sooner than do the least harm here or give the slightest pain to the mother of our dear Francis. Only take me to the parsonage house to-night, dear M. Bonnet, so that I can pray a while on *his* grave; it was just that that drew me here, for as I came nearer and nearer the place where *he* lies I felt quite a different being. No, I did not believe I should feel so happy here—"

"Very well," said the curé; "come, let us go. If at some future day you can come back without evil consequences, I will write to tell you, Denise; but perhaps after this visit to your old home you may feel able to live yonder without suffering—"

"Leave this country now when it is so beautiful here! Just see what Mme. Graslin has made of the Gabou!" she added, pointing to the moonlit lake. "And then all this will belong to our dear Francis—"

"You shall not go, Denise," said Mme. Graslin, appearing in the stable doorway.

Jean-François Tascheron's sister clasped her hands at the sight of this ghost who spoke to her; for Véronique's white face in the moonlight looked unsubstantial as a shadow

against the dark background of the open stable door. Her eyes glittered like two stars.

"No, child, you shall not leave the country you have travelled so far to see, and you shall be happy here, unless God should refuse to second my efforts; for God, no doubt, has sent you here, Denise."

She took the astonished girl's hand in hers, and went with her down the path toward the opposite shore of the lake. Mme. Sauviat and the curé, left alone, sat down on the bench.

"Let her have her way," murmured Mme. Sauviat.

A few minutes later Véronique returned alone; her mother and the curé brought her back to the chateau. Doubtless she had thought of some plan of action which suited the mystery, for nobody saw Denise, no one knew that she had come back.

Mme. Graslin took to her bed, nor did she leave it. Every day she grew worse. It seemed to vex her that she could not rise, for again and again she made vain efforts to get up and take a walk in the park. One morning in early June, some days after that night at the chalet, she made a violent effort and rose and tried to dress herself, as if for a festival. She begged Gérard to lend her his arm; for her friends came daily for news of her, and when Aline said that her mistress meant to go out they all hurried up to the chateau. Mme. Graslin had summoned all her remaining strength to spend it on this last walk. She gained her object by a violent spasmodic effort of the will, inevitably followed by a deadly reaction.

"Let us go to the chalet—and alone," she said to Gérard. The tones of her voice were soft, and there was something like coquetry in her glance. "This is my last escapade, for I dreamed last night that the doctors had come."

"Would you like to see your woods?" asked Gérard.

"For the last time. But," she added, in coaxing tones, "I have some strange proposals to make to you."

Gérard, by her direction, rowed her across the second

lake, when she had reached it on foot. He was at a loss to understand such a journey, but she indicated the summer-house as their destination, and he plied his oars.

There was a long pause. Her eyes wandered over the hillsides, the water, and the sky; then she spoke—"My friend, it is a strange request that I am about to make to you, but I think that you are the man to obey me."

"In everything," he said, "sure as I am that you cannot will anything but good."

"I want you to marry," she said; "you will fulfil the wishes of a dying woman, who is certain that she is securing your happiness."

"I am too ugly!" said Gérard.

"*She* is pretty, she is young, she wants to live in Monté-gnac; and if you marry her, you will do something toward making my last moments easier. We need not discuss her qualities. I tell you this, that she is a woman of a thousand; and as for her charms, youth, and beauty, the first sight will suffice, we shall see her in a moment in the summer-house. On our way back you shall give me your answer, a 'Yes' or a 'No,' in sober earnest."

Mme. Graslin smiled as she saw the oars move more swiftly after this confidence. Denise, who was living out of sight in the island sanctuary, saw Mme. Graslin, and hurried to the door. Véronique and Gérard came in. In spite of herself, the poor girl flushed as she met the eyes that Gérard turned upon her; Denise's beauty was an agreeable surprise to him.

"La Curieux does not let you want for anything, does she?" asked Véronique.

"Look, madame," said Denise, pointing to the breakfast table.

"This is M. Gérard, of whom I have spoken to you," Véronique went on. "He will be my son's guardian, and when I am dead you will all live together at the chateau until Francis comes of age."

"Oh, madame! don't talk like that."

"Just look at me, child!" said Véronique, and all at once she saw tears in the girl's eyes. — "She comes from New York," she added, turning to Gérard.

This by way of putting both on a footing of acquaintance. Gérard asked questions of Denise, and Mme. Graslin left them to chat, going to look out over the view of the last lake on the Gabou. At six o'clock Gérard and Véronique rowed back to the chalet.

"Well?" queried she, looking at her friend.

"You have my word."

"You may be without prejudices," Véronique began, "but you ought to know how it was that she was obliged to leave the country, poor child, brought back by a home-sick longing."

"A slip."

"Oh, no," said Véronique, "or should I introduce her to you? She is the sister of a working man who died on the scaffold . . ."

"Oh! Tascheron, who murdered old Pingret—"

"Yes. She is a murderer's sister," said Mme. Graslin, with inexpressible irony in her voice; "you can take back your word."

She went no further. Gérard was compelled to carry her to the bench at the chalet, and for some minutes she lay there unconscious. Gérard, kneeling beside her, said, as soon as she opened her eyes—"I will marry Denise."

Mme. Graslin made him rise, she took his head in her hands, and set a kiss on his forehead. Then, seeing that he was astonished to be thus thanked, she grasped his hand and said—"You will soon know the meaning of this puzzle. Let us try to reach the terrace again, our friends are there. It is very late, and I feel very weak, and yet, I should like to bid farewell from afar to this dear plain of mine."

The weather had been intolerably hot all day; and though the storms, which did so much damage that year in different parts of Europe and in France itself, respected the Limousin, there had been thunder along the Loire, and the air began to

grow fresher. The sky was so pure that the least details on the horizon were sharp and clear. What words can describe the delicious concert of sounds, the smothered hum of the township, now alive with workers returning from the fields? It would need the combined work of a great landscape painter and a painter of figures to do justice to such a picture. Is there not, in fact, a subtle connection between the lassitude of Nature and the laborer's weariness, an affinity of mood hardly to be rendered? In the tepid twilight of the dog days, the rarefied air gives its full significance to the least sound made by every living thing.

The women sit chatting at their doors with a bit of work even then in their hands, as they wait for the goodman who, probably, will bring the children home. The smoke going up from the roofs is the sign of the last meal of the day and the gayest for the peasants; after it they will sleep. The stir at that hour is the expression of happy and tranquil thoughts in those who have finished their day's work. There is a very distinct difference between their evening and morning snatches of song; for in this the village folk are like the birds, the last twitterings at night are utterly unlike their notes at dawn. All Nature joins in the hymn of rest at the end of the day, as in the hymn of gladness at sunrise; all things take the softly blended hues that the sunset throws across the fields, tingeing the dusty roads with mellow light. If any should be bold enough to deny the influences of the fairest hour of the day, the very flowers would convict him of falsehood, intoxicating him with their subtlest scents, mingled with the tenderest sounds of insects the amorous faint twitter of birds.

Thin films of mist hovered above the "water-lanes" that furrowed the plain below the township. The poplars and acacias and sumac trees, planted in equal numbers along the roads, had grown so tall already that they shaded it, and in the wide fields on either side the large and celebrated herds of cattle were scattered about in groups, some still browsing, others chewing the cud. Men, women and

children were busy getting in the last of the hay, the most picturesque of all field work. The evening air, less languid since the sudden breath of coolness after the storms, bore the wholesome scents of mown grass and swathes of hay. The least details in the beautiful landscape stood out perfectly sharp and clear.

There was some fear for the weather. The ricks were being finished in all haste; men hurried about them with loaded forks, raked the heaps together, and loaded the carts. Out in the distance the scythes were still busy, the women were turning the long swathes that looked like hatched lines across the fields into dotted rows of haycocks.

Sounds of laughter came up from the hayfields, the workers frolicked over their work, the children shouted as they buried each other in the heaps. Every figure was distinct, the women's petticoats, pink, red, or blue, their kerchiefs, their bare arms and legs, the wide-brimmed straw hats of field-workers, the men's shirts, the white trousers that nearly all of them wore.

The last rays of sunlight fell like a bright dust over the long lines of poplar trees by the channels which divided up the plain into fields of various sizes, and lingered caressingly over the groups of men, women, and children, horses and carts and cattle. The shepherds and herdsmen began to gather their flocks together with the sound of their horns. The plain seemed so silent and so full of sound, a strange antithesis, but only strange to those who do not know the splendors of the fields. Loads of green fodder came into the township from every side. There was something indescribably somnolent in the influence of the scene, and Véronique, between the curé and Gérard, uttered no word.

At last they came to a gap made by a rough track that led from the houses ranged below the terrace to the parsonage house and the church; and looking down into Montégnac, Gérard and M. Bonnet saw the upturned faces of the women, men, and children, all looking at them. Doubtless it was

Mme. Graslin more particularly whom they followed with their eyes. And what affection and gratitude there was in their way of doing this! With what blessings did they not greet Véronique's appearance! With what devout intentness they watched the three benefactors of a whole countryside! It was as if man added a hymn of gratitude to all the songs of evening. While Mme. Graslin walked with her eyes set on the magnificent distant expanse of green, her dearest creation, the mayor and the curé watched the groups below. There was no mistake about their expression; grief, melancholy, and regret, mingled with hope, were plainly visible in them all. There was not a soul in Montégnac but knew how that M. Roubaud had gone to Paris to fetch some great doctors, and that the beneficent lady of the canton was nearing the end of a fatal illness. On market days in every place for thirty miles round, the peasants asked the Montégnac folk, "How is your mistress?" And so, the great thought of death hovered over this countryside amid the fair picture of the hay fields.

Far off in the plain, more than one mower sharpening his scythe, more than one girl leaning on her rake, or farmer among his stacks of hay, looked up and paused thoughtfully to watch Mme. Graslin, their great lady, the pride of the Corrèze. They tried to discover some hopeful sign, or watched her admiringly, prompted by a feeling which put work out of their minds. "She is out of doors, so she must be better!" The simple phrase was on all lips.

Mme. Graslin's mother was sitting at the end of the terrace. Véronique had placed a cast-iron garden-seat in the corner, so that she might sit there and look down into the churchyard through the balustrade. Mme. Sauviat watched her daughter as she walked along the terrace, and her eyes filled with tears. She knew something of the preternatural effort which Véronique was making; she knew that even at that moment her daughter was suffering fearful pain, and that it was only a heroic effort of will that enabled her to stand. Tears, almost like tears of blood, found their way

down among the sunburned wrinkles of a face like parchment, that seemed as if it could not alter one crease for any emotion any more. Little Graslin, standing between M. Ruffin's knees, cried for sympathy.

"What is the matter, child?" the tutor asked sharply.

"Grandmamma is crying—"

M. Ruffin's eyes had been fixed on Mme. Graslin, who was coming toward them; he looked at Mme. Sauviat; the Roman matron's face, stony with sorrow and wet with tears, gave him a great shock. That dumb grief had invested the old woman with a certain grandeur and sacredness.

"Madame, why did you let her go out?" asked the tutor.

Véronique was coming nearer. She walked like a queen with admirable grace in her whole bearing. And Mme. Sauviat knew that she should outlive her daughter, and in the cry of despair that broke from her, a secret escaped that revealed many things which roused curiosity.

"To think of it! She walks and wears a horrible hair shirt always pricking her skin!"

The young man's blood ran cold at her words; he could not be insensible to the exquisite grace of Véronique's movements, and shuddered as he thought of the cruel, unrelenting mastery that the soul must have gained over the body. A Parisienne famed for her graceful figure, the ease of her carriage and bearing, might perhaps have feared comparison with Véronique at that moment.

"She has worn it for thirteen years, ever since the child was weaned," the old woman said, pointing to young Graslin. "She has worked miracles here; and if they but knew her life, they might put her among the saints. Nobody has seen her eat since she came here, do you know why? Aline brings her a bit of dry bread three times a day on a great platter full of ashes, and vegetables cooked in water without any salt, on a red earthenware dish that they put a dog's food in! Yes. That is the way she lives who has given life to the canton.—She says her prayers kneeling on the hem of her cilice. She says that if she did not practice

these austerities, she could not wear the smiling face you see.—I am telling you this" (and the old woman's voice dropped lower) "for you to tell it to the doctor that M. Roubaud has gone to fetch from Paris. If he will prevent my daughter from continuing these penances, they might save her yet (who knows?) though the hand of death is on her head. Look! Ah, I must be very strong to have borne all these things for fifteen years."

The old woman took her grandson's hand, raised it, and passed it over her forehead and cheeks as if some restorative balm communicated itself in the touch of the little hand; then she set a kiss upon it, a kiss full of the love which is the secret of grandmothers no less than mothers. By this time Véronique was only a few paces distant, Clousier was with her, and the curé and Gérard. Her face, lighted up by the setting sun, was radiant with awful beauty.

One thought, steadfast amid many inward troubles, seemed to be written in the lines that furrowed the sallow forehead in long folds piled one above the other like clouds. The outlines of her face, now completely colorless, entirely white with the dead olive-tinged whiteness of plants grown without sunlight, were thin but not withered, and showed traces of great physical suffering produced by mental anguish. She had quelled the body through the soul, and the soul through the body. So completely worn out was she that she resembled her past self only as an old woman resembles her portrait painted in girlhood. The glowing expression of her eyes spoke of the absolute domination of a Christian will over a body reduced to the subjection required by religion, for in this woman the flesh was at the mercy of the spirit. As in profane poetry Achilles dragged the dead body of Hector, victoriously she dragged it over the stony ways of life; and thus for fifteen years she had compassed the heavenly Jerusalem which she hoped to enter, not as a thief, but amid triumphant acclamations. Never was anchorite amid the parched and arid deserts of Africa more master of his senses than Véronique in her splendid chateau in a rich

land of soft and luxuriant landscape, nestling under the mantle of the great forest where science, heir to Moses' rod, had caused plenty to spring forth and the prosperity and the welfare of a whole countryside. Véronique was looking out over the results of twelve years of patience, on the accomplishment of a task on which a man of ability might have prided himself; but with the gentle modesty which Pontorno's brush depicted in the expression of his symbolical "Christian Chastity"—with her arms about the unicorn. Her two companions respected her silent mood when they saw that she was gazing over the vast plain, once sterile, and now fertile; the devout lady of the manor went with folded arms and eyes fixed on the point where the road reached the horizon.

Suddenly she stopped when but two paces away from Mme. Sauviat, who watched her as Christ's mother must have gazed at her Son upon the Cross. Véronique raised her hand and pointed to the spot where the road turned off to Montégnac.

"Do you see that calèche and the four post-horses?" she asked, smiling. "That is M. Roubaud. He is coming back. We shall soon know now how many hours I have to live."

"*Hours!*" echoed Gérard.

"Did I not tell you that this was my last walk?" she said. "Did I not come to see this beautiful view in all its glory for the last time?"

She indicated the fair meadowland, lighted up by the last rays of the sun, and the township below. All the village had come out and stood in the square in front of the church.

"Ah," she went on, "let me think that there is God's benediction in the strange atmospheric conditions that have favored our hay harvest. Storms all about us, rain and hail and thunder have laid waste pitilessly and incessantly, but not here. The people think so; why should not I follow their example? I need so much to find some good augury on earth for that which awaits me when my eyes shall be closed!"

Her child came to her, took his mother's hand, and laid it on his hair. The great eloquence of that movement touched Véronique; with preternatural strength she caught him up, held him on her left arm a moment as she used to hold him as a child at the breast, and kissed him. "Do you see this land, my boy?" she said. "You must go on with your mother's work when you are a man."

Then the curé spoke sadly: "There are a very few strong and privileged natures who are permitted to see Death face to face, to fight a long duel with him, and to show courage and skill that strike others with admiration; this is the dreadful spectacle that you give us, madame; but, perhaps, you are somewhat wanting in pity for us. Leave us at least the hope that you are mistaken, that God will permit you to finish all that you have begun."

"I have done nothing save through you, my friends," said she. "It was in my power to be useful to you; it is so no longer. Everything about us is green; there is no desolate waste here now, save my own heart. You know it, dear curé, you know that I can only find peace and pardon *there*—"

She held out her hand over the churchyard. She had never said so much since the day when she first came to Montégnac and fainted away on that very spot. The curé gazed at his penitent; and, accustomed as he had been for long to read her thoughts, he knew from those simple words that he had won a fresh victory. It must have cost Véronique a terrible effort over herself to break a twelve years' silence with such pregnant words; and the curé clasped his hands with the devout fervor familiar to him, and looked with deep religious emotion on the family group about him. All their secrets had passed through his heart.

Gérard looked bewildered; the words "peace and pardon" seemed to sound strangely in his ears; M. Ruffin's eyes were fixed in a sort of dull amazement on Mme. Graslin. And meanwhile the calèche sped rapidly along the road, threading its way from tree to tree.

"There are five of them!" said the curé, who could see and count the travellers.

"Five!" exclaimed M. Gérard. "Will five of them know more than two?"

"Ah!" murmured Mme. Graslin, who leaned on the curé's arm, "there is the public prosecutor. What does he come to do here?"

"And Papa Grossetete too!" cried Francis.

"Madame, take courage, be worthy of yourself," said the curé. He drew Mme. Graslin, who was leaning heavily on him, a few paces aside.

"What does he want?" she said for all answer, and she went to lean against the balustrade.—"Mother!"

Mme. Sauviat sprang forward with an activity that belied her years.

"I shall see him again . . ." said Véronique.

"If he is coming with M. Grossetete," said the curé, "it can only be with good intentions, of course."

"Ah! sir, my daughter is dying!" cried Mme. Sauviat, seeing the change that passed over Mme. Graslin's face at the words. "How will she endure such cruel agitations? M. Grossetete has always prevented that man from coming to see Véronique—"

Véronique's face flamed.

"So you hate him, do you?" the Abbé Bonnet asked, turning to his penitent.

"She left Limoges lest all Limoges should know her secrets," said Mme. Sauviat, terrified by that sudden change wrought in Mme. Graslin's drawn features.

"Do you not see that his presence will poison the hours that remain to me, when Heaven alone should be in my thoughts? He is nailing me down to earth!" cried Véronique.

The curé took Mme. Graslin's arm once more, and constrained her to walk a few paces; when they were alone, he looked full at her with one of those angelic looks which calm the most violent tumult in the soul.

"If it is thus," he said, "I, as your confessor, bid you to receive him, to be kind and gracious to him, to lay aside this garment of anger, and to forgive him as God will forgive you. Can there be a taint of passion in the soul that I deemed purified? Burn this last grain of incense on the altar of penitence, lest all shall be one lie in you."

"There was still this last struggle to make, and it is made," she said, drying her eyes. "The evil one was lurking in the last recess in my heart, and doubtless it was God who put into M. de Granville's heart the thought that sends him here. How many times will He smite me yet?" she cried.

She stopped as if to put up an inward prayer; then she turned to Mme. Sauviat, and said in a low voice—"Mother dear, be nice and kind to M. le Procureur-général."

In spite of herself, the old Auvergnate shuddered feverishly.

"There is no hope left," she said, as she caught at the curé's hand.

As she spoke, the cracking of the postilion's whip announced that the calèche was climbing the avenue; the great gateway stood open, the carriage turned in the courtyard, and in another moment the travellers came out upon the terrace. Besides the public prosecutor and M. Grossetete, the Archbishop had come (M. Dutheil was in Limoges for Gabriel de Rastignac's consecration as Bishop), and M. Roubaud came arm in arm with Horace Bianchon, one of the greatest doctors in Paris.

"You are welcome," said Véronique, addressing her guests, "and *you*" (holding out a hand to the public prosecutor and grasping his) "especially welcome."

M. Grossetete, the Archbishop, and Mme. Sauviat exchanged glances at this; so great was their astonishment, that it overcame the profound discretion of old age.

"And I thank him who brought you here," Véronique went on, as she looked on the Comte de Granville's face for the first time in fifteen years. "I have borne you a grudge

for a long time, but now I know that I have done you an injustice; you shall know the reason of all this if you will stay here in Montégnac for two days."—She turned to Horace Bianchon—"This gentleman will confirm my apprehensions, no doubt."—Then to the Archbishop—"It is God surely who sends you to me, my lord," she said with a bow. "For our old friendship's sake you will not refuse to be with me in my last moments. By what grace, I wonder, have I all those who have loved me and sustained me all my life about me now?"

At the word "loved" she turned with graceful, deliberate intent toward M. de Granville; the kindness in her manner brought tears into his eyes. There was a deep silence. The two doctors asked themselves what witchcraft it was that enabled the woman before them to stand upright while enduring the agony which she must suffer. The other three were so shocked at the change that illness had wrought in her that they could only communicate their thoughts by the eyes.

"Permit me to go with these gentlemen," she said, with her unvarying grace of manner; "it is an urgent question." She took leave of her guests, and, leaning upon the two doctors, went toward the chateau so slowly and painfully that it was evident that the end was at hand.

The Archbishop looked at the curé.

"M. Bonnet," he said, "you have worked wonders!"

"Not I, but God, my lord," answered the other.

"They said that she was dying," exclaimed M. Grossetete; "why, she is dead! There is nothing left but a spirit—"

"A soul," said M. Gérard.

"She is the same as ever," cried the public prosecutor.

"She is a Stoic after the manner of the old Greek Zeno," said the tutor.

Silently they went along the terrace and looked out over the landscape that glowed a most glorious red color in the light shed abroad by the fires of the sunset.

"It is thirteen years since I saw this before," said the Archbishop, indicating the fertile fields, the valley, and

the hill above Montégnac, "so for me this miracle is as extraordinary as another which I have just witnessed; for how can you let Mme. Graslin stand upright? She ought to be lying in bed—"

"So she was," said Mme. Sauviat. "She never left her bed for ten days, but she was determined to get up to see this place for the last time."

"I understand," said M. de Granville. "She wished to say farewell to all that she had called into being, but she ran the risk of dying here on the terrace."

"M. Roubaud said that she was not to be thwarted," said Mme. Sauviat.

"What a marvellous thing!" exclaimed the Archbishop, whose eyes never wearied of wandering over the view. "She has made the waste into sown fields. But we know, monsieur," he added, turning to Gérard, "that your skill and your labors have been a great factor in this."

"We have only been her laborers," the mayor said. "Yes; we are only the hands, she was the head."

Mme. Sauviat left the group, and went to hear what the opinion of the doctor from Paris was.

"We shall stand in need of heroism to be present at this deathbed," said the public prosecutor, addressing the Archbishop and the curé.

"Yes," said M. Grossetete; "but for such a friend great things should be done."

While they waited and came and went, oppressed by heavy thoughts, two of Mme. Graslin's tenants came up. They had come, they said, on behalf of a whole township waiting in painful suspense to hear the verdict of the doctor from Paris.

"They are in consultation, we know nothing as yet, my friends," said the Archbishop.

M. Roubaud came hurrying toward them, and at the sound of his quick footsteps the others hastened to meet him.

"Well?" asked the mayor.

"She has not forty-eight hours to live," answered M. Roubaud. "The disease has developed while I was away. M. Bianchon cannot understand how she could walk. These seldom seen phenomena are always the result of great exaltation of mind.—And so, gentlemen," he added, speaking to the churchmen, "she has passed out of our hands and into yours; science is powerless; my illustrious colleague thinks that there is scarcely time for the ceremonies of the Church."

"Let us put up the prayers appointed for times of great calamity," said the curé, and he went away with his parishioners. "His lordship will no doubt condescend to administer the last sacraments."

The Archbishop bowed his head in reply; he could not say a word, his eyes were full of tears. The group sat down or leaned against the balustrade, and each was deep in his own thoughts. The church bells pealed mournfully, the sound of many footsteps came up from below, the whole village was flocking to the service. The light of the altar candles gleamed through the trees in M. Bonnet's garden, and then began the sounds of chanting. A faintly flushed twilight overspread the fields, the birds had ceased to sing, and the only sound in the plain was the shrill, melancholy, long-drawn note of the frogs.

"Let us do our duty," said the Archbishop at last, and he went slowly toward the house, like a man who carries a burden greater than he can bear.

The consultation had taken place in the great drawing-room, a vast apartment which communicated with a state bedroom, draped with crimson damask. Here Graslin had exhibited to the full the self-made man's taste for display. Véronique had not entered the room half-a-dozen times in fourteen years; the great suite of apartments was completely useless to her; she had never received visitors in them, but the effort she had made to discharge her last obligations and to quell her revolted physical nature had left her powerless to reach her own rooms.

The great doctor had taken his patient's hand and felt her pulse, then he looked significantly at M. Roubaud, and the two men carried her into the adjoining room and laid her on the bed, Aline hastily flinging open the doors for them. There were, of course, no sheets on the state bed; the two doctors laid Mme. Graslin at full length on the crimson quilt, Roubaud opened the windows, flung back the Venetian shutters, and summoned help. La Sauviat and the servants came hurrying to the room; they lighted the wax candles (yellow with age) in the sconces.

Then the dying woman smiled. "It is decreed that my death shall be a festival, as a Christian's death should be."

During the consultation she spoke again—"The public prosecutor has done his work; I was going; he has despatched me sooner—"

The old mother laid a finger on her lips with a warning glance.

"Mother, I will speak now," Véronique said in answer. "Look! the finger of God is in all this; I shall die very soon in this room hung with red . . ."

La Sauviat went out in dismay at the words.

"Aline!" she cried, "she is speaking out!—"

"Ah! madame's mind is wandering," said the faithful waiting-woman, coming in with the sheets. "Send for M. le Curé, madame."

"You must undress your mistress," said Bianchon, as soon as Aline entered the room.

"It will be very difficult; madame wears a hair shirt next her skin."

"What?" the great doctor cried, "are such horrors still practiced in this nineteenth century?"

"Mme. Graslin has never allowed me to touch the stomach," said M. Roubaud. "I could learn nothing of her complaint save from her face and her pulse, and from what I could learn from her mother and her maid."

Véronique was laid on a sofa while they made the great bed ready for her at the further end of the room. The doc-

tors spoke together with lowered voices as La Sauviat and Aline made the bed. There was a look terrible to see in the two women's faces; the same thought was wringing both their hearts. "We are making her bed for the last time—this will be her bed of death."

The consultation was brief. In the first place, Bianchon insisted that Aline and La Sauviat must cut the patient out of the cilice and put her in a nightdress. The two doctors waited in the great drawing-room while this was done. Aline came out with the terrible instrument of penance wrapped in a towel. "Madame is just one wound," she told them.

"Madame, you have a stronger will than Napoleon had," said Bianchon, when the two doctors had come in again, and Véronique had given clear answers to the questions put to her. "You are preserving your faculties in the last stage of a disease in which the Emperor's brilliant intellect sank. From what I know of you, I feel that I owe it to you to tell you the truth."

"I implore you, with clasped hands, to tell it me," she said; "you can measure the strength that remains to me, and I have need of all the life that is in me for a few hours yet."

"You must think of nothing but your salvation," said Bianchon.

"If God grants that body and mind die together," she said, with a divinely sweet smile, "believe that the favor is vouchsafed for the glory of His Church on earth. My mind is still needed to carry out a thought from God, while Napoleon had accomplished his destiny."

The two doctors looked at each other in amazement; the words were spoken as easily as if Mme. Graslin had been in her drawing-room.

"Ah! here is the doctor who will heal me," she added as the Archbishop entered.

She summoned all her strength to sit upright to take leave of M. Bianchon, speaking graciously, and asking him to accept something besides money for the good news which he had just brought her; then she whispered a few words to

her mother, who went out with the doctor. She asked the Archbishop to wait until the curé should come, and seemed to wish to rest for a little while. Aline sat by her mistress's bedside.

At midnight Mme. Graslin woke and asked for the Archbishop and the curé.. Aline told her that they were in the room engaged in prayer for her. With a sign she dismissed her mother and the maid, and beckoned the two priests to her bed.

"Nothing of what I shall say is unknown to you, my lord, nor to you, M. le Curé. You, my Lord Archbishop, were the first to look into my conscience; at a glance you read almost the whole past, and that which you saw was enough for you. My confessor, an angel sent by Heaven to be near me, knows something more; I have confessed all to him, as in duty bound. And now I wish to consult you—whose minds are enlightened by the spirit of the Church; I want to ask you how such a woman as I should take leave of this life as a true Christian. You, spirits holy and austere, do you think that if Heaven vouchsafes pardon to the most complete and profound repentance ever made by a guilty soul, I shall have accomplished my whole task here on earth?"

"Yes; yes, my daughter," said the Archbishop.

"No, my father, no!" she cried, sitting upright, and lightnings flashed from her eyes. "Yonder lies an unhappy man in his grave, not many steps away, under the sole weight of a hideous crime; here, in this sumptuous house, there is a woman crowned with the aureole of good deeds and a virtuous life. They bless the woman; they curse him, poor boy. On the criminal they heap execrations, I enjoy the good opinion of all; yet most of the blame of his crime is mine, and a great part of the good for which they praise me so and are grateful to me is his; cheat that I am! I have the credit of it, and he, a martyr to his loyalty to me, is covered with shame. In a few hours I shall die, and a whole canton will weep for me, a whole department will praise my good deeds,

my piety, and my virtues; and he died reviled and scorned, a whole town crowding about to see him die, for hate of the murderer! You, my judges, are indulgent to me, but I hear an imperious voice within me that will not let me rest. Ah! God's hand, more heavy than yours, has been laid upon me day by day, as if to warn me that all was not expiated yet. My sin shall be redeemed by public confession. Oh! he was happy, that criminal who went to a shameful death in the face of earth and heaven! But as for me, I cheated justice, and I am still a cheat! All the respect shown to me has been like mockery, not a word of praise but has scorched my heart like fire. And now the public prosecutor has come here. Do you not see that the will of Heaven is in accordance with this voice that cries 'Confess'?"

Both priests, the prince of the Church and the simple country parson, the two great luminaries, remained silent, and kept their eyes fixed on the ground. So deeply moved were the judges by the greatness and the submission of the sinner that they could not pass sentence. After a pause the Archbishop raised his noble face, thin and worn with the daily practice of austerity in a devout life.

"My child," he said, "you are going beyond the commandments of the Church. It is the glory of the Church that she adapts her dogmas to the conditions of life in every age; for the Church is destined to make the pilgrimage of the centuries side by side with humanity. According to the decision of the Church, private confession has replaced public confession. This substitution has made the new rule of life. The sufferings which you have endured suffice. Depart in peace. God has heard you indeed."

"But is not this wish of a criminal in accordance with the rule of the Early Church, which filled heaven with as many saints and martyrs and confessors as there are stars in heaven?" Véronique cried earnestly. "Who was it that wrote 'Confess your faults one to another'? Was it not one of our Saviour's own immediate disciples? Let me confess my shame publicly upon my knees. That will be

an expiation of the wrong that I have done to the world, and to a family exiled and almost extinct through my sin. The world should know that my good deeds are not an offering to God; that they are only the just payment of a debt. . . . Suppose that, when I am gone, some finger should raise the veil of lies that covers me? . . . Oh, the thought of it brings the supreme hour nearer."

"I see calculation in this, my child," the Archbishop said gravely. "There are still strong passions left in you; that which I deemed extinguished is—"

"My lord," she cried, breaking in upon the speaker, turning her fixed horror-stricken eyes on him, "I swear to you that my heart is purified so far as it may be in a guilty and repentant woman: there is no thought left in me now but the thought of God."

"Let us leave Heaven's justice to take its course, my lord," the curé said, in a softened voice. "I have opposed this idea for four years. It has caused the only differences of opinion which have arisen between my penitent and me. I have seen the very depths of this soul; earth has no hold left there. When the tears, sighs, and contrition of fifteen years have buried a sin in which two beings shared, do not think that there is the least luxurious taint in the long and dreadful remorse. For a long while memory has ceased to mingle its flames in the most ardent repentance. Yes, many tears have quenched so great a fire. I will answer," he said, stretching his hand out above Mme. Graslin's head and raising his tear-filled eyes, "I will answer for the purity of this archangel's soul. I used once to see in this desire a thought of reparation to an absent family; it seems as if God Himself has sent one member of it here, through one of those accidents in which His guidance is unmistakably revealed."

Véronique took the curé's trembling hand, and kissed it.

"You have often been harsh to me, dear pastor," she said; "and now, in this moment, I discover where your apostolic sweetness lay hidden.—You," she said, turning to the Archbishop, "you, the supreme head of this corner

of God's earthly kingdom, be my stay in this time of humiliation. I shall prostrate myself as the lowest of women; you will raise me, a forgiven soul, equal, it may be, with those who have never gone astray."

The Archbishop was silent for a while, engaged, no doubt, in weighing the considerations visible to his eagle's glance.

"My lord," said the curé, "deadly blows have been aimed at religion. Will not this return to ancient customs, made necessary by the greatness both of the sin and the repentance, be a triumph which will redound to us?"

"They will say that we are fanatics! that we have insisted on this cruel scene!" and the Archbishop fell once more to his meditations.

Just at that moment Horace Bianchon and Roubaud came in without knocking at the door. As it opened, Véronique saw her mother, her son, and all the servants kneeling in prayer. The curés of the two neighboring parishes had come to assist M. Bonnet; perhaps also to pay their respects to the great Archbishop, in whom the Church of France saw a cardinal-designate, hoping that some day the Sacred College might be enlightened by the advent of an intellect so thoroughly Gallican.

Horace Bianchon was about to start for Paris; he came to bid farewell to the dying lady, and to thank her for her munificence. He approached the bed slowly, guessing from the manner of the two priests that the inward wound which had caused the disease of the body was now under consideration. He took Véronique's hand, laid it on the bed, and felt her pulse. The deepest silence, the silence of the fields in a summer night, added solemnity to the scene. Lights shone from the great drawing-room, beyond the folding doors, and fell upon the little company of kneeling figures; the curés only were seated, reading their breviaries. About the crimson bed of state stood the Archbishop in his violet robes, the curé, and the two men of science.

"She is troubled even in death!" said Horace Bianchon.

Like many men of great genius, he not seldom found grand words worthy of the scenes at which he was present.

The Archbishop rose, as if goaded by some inward impulse. He called M. Bonnet, and went toward the door. They crossed the chamber and the drawing-room, and went out upon the terrace, where they walked up and down for a few minutes. As they came in after a consideration of this point of ecclesiastical discipline, Roubaud went to meet them.

"M. Bianchon sent me to tell you to be quick; Mme. Graslin is dying in strange agitation, which is not caused by the severe physical pain which she is suffering."

The Archbishop hurried back, and in reply to Mme. Graslin's anxious eyes, he said, "You shall be satisfied."

Bianchon (still with his fingers on the dying woman's wrist) made an involuntary start of surprise; he gave Roubaud a quick look, and then glanced at the priests.

"My lord, this body is no longer our province," he said; "your words brought life in the place of death. You make a miracle credible."

"Madame has been nothing but soul this long time past," said Roubaud, and Véronique thanked him by a glance.

A smile crossed her face as she lay there, and, with the smile that expressed the gladness of a completed expiation, the innocent look of the girl of eighteen returned to her. The appalling lines traced by inward tumult, the dark coloring, the livid patches, all the details that but lately had contributed a certain dreadful beauty to her face, all alterations of all kinds, in short, had vanished; to those who watched Véronique it seemed as if she had been wearing a mask and had suddenly dropped it. The wonderful transfiguration by which the inward life and nature of this woman was made visible in her features was wrought for the last time. Her whole being was purified and illuminated, her face might have caught a gleam from the flaming swords of the guardian angels about her. She looked once more as she used to look in Limoges when they called her "the little Virgin."

The love of God manifestly was yet stronger in her than the guilty love had been; the earthly love had brought out all the forces of life in her; the love of God dispelled every trace of the inroads of death. A smothered cry was heard. La Sauviat appeared; she sprang to the bed. "So I see my child again at last!" she exclaimed.

Something in the old woman's accent as she uttered the two words, "my child," conjured up such visions of early childhood and its innocence, that those who watched by this heroic deathbed turned their heads away to hide their emotion. The great doctor took Mme. Graslin's hand, kissed it, and then went his way, and soon the sound of his departing carriage sent echoes over the countryside, spreading the tidings that he had no hope of saving the life of her who was the life of the country. The Archbishop, curé, and doctor, and all who felt tired, went to take a little rest. Mme. Graslin herself slept for some hours. When she awoke the dawn was breaking; she asked them to open the windows, she would see her last sunrise.

At ten o'clock in the morning the Archbishop, in pontifical vestments, came back to Mme. Graslin's room. Both he and M. Bonnet reposed such confidence in her that they made no recommendations as to the limits to be observed in her confession. Véronique saw other faces of other clergy, for some of the curés from neighboring parishes had come. The splendid ornaments which Mme. Graslin had presented to her beloved parish church lent splendor to the ceremony. Eight children, choristers in their red-and-white surplices, stood in a double row between the bed and the door of the great drawing-room, each of them holding one of the great candlesticks of gilded bronze which Véronique had ordered from Paris. A white-haired sacristan on either side of the dais held the banner of the Church and the crucifix. The servants, in their devotion, had removed the wooden altar from the sacristy and erected it near the drawing-room door; it was decked and ready for the Archbishop to say mass. Mme. Graslin was touched by an attention which the Church

pays only to crowned heads. The great folding doors that gave access to the dining-room stood wide open, so that she could see the hall of the chateau filled with people; nearly all the village was there.

Her friends had seen to everything, none but the people of the house stood in the drawing-room; and before them, grouped about the door of her room, she saw her intimate friends and those whose discretion might be trusted. M. Grossetete, M. de Granville, Roubaud, Gérard, Clousier, and Ruffin stood foremost among these. All of them meant to stand upright when the time came, so that the dying woman's confession should not travel beyond them. Other things favored this design, for the sobs of those about her drowned her voice.

Two of these stood out dreadfully conspicuous among the rest. The first was Denise Tascheron. In her foreign dress, made with Quakerly simplicity, she was unrecognizable to any of the villagers who might have caught a glimpse of her. Not so for the public prosecutor; she was a figure that he was not likely to forget, and with her reappearance a dreadful light began to dawn on him. Now he had a glimpse of the truth, a suspicion of the part which he had played in Mme. Graslin's life, and then the whole truth flashed upon him. Less overawed than the rest by the religious influence, the child of the nineteenth century, the man of law felt a cruel sensation of dismay; the whole drama of Véronique's inner life in the Hotel Graslin during Tascheron's trial opened out before him. The whole of that tragic epoch reconstructed itself in his memory, lighted up by La Sauviat's eyes, which gleamed with hate of him not ten paces away; those eyes seemed to direct a double stream of molten lead upon him. The old woman had forgiven him nothing. The impersonation of man's justice felt shudders run through his frame. He stood there heart-stricken and pallid, not daring to turn his eyes to the bed where the woman whom he had loved was lying, livid beneath the shadow of Death's hand, drawing strength from the very magnitude

of her offence to quell her agony. Vertigo seized on him as he saw Véronique's shrunken profile, a white outline in sharp relief against the crimson damask.

The mass began at eleven o'clock. When the curé of Vizay had read the epistle, the Archbishop divested himself of his dalmatic, and took up his station in the doorway—

"Christians here assembled to witness the administration of extreme unction to the mistress of this house, you who are uniting your prayers to those of the Church to make intercession with God for the salvation of her soul, learn that she thinks herself unworthy to receive the holy viaticum until she has made, for the edification of others, a public confession of her greatest sin. We withstood her pious desire, although this act of contrition was long in use in the Church in the earliest Christian times; but as the afflicted woman tells us that the confession touches on the rehabilitation of an unhappy child of this parish, we leave her free to follow the inspirations of repentance."

After these words, spoken with the benign dignity of a shepherd of souls, the Archbishop turned and gave place to Véronique. The dying woman was seen, supported by her mother and the curé, two great and venerable symbols: did she not owe her double existence to the earthly mother who had borne her, and to the Church, the mother of her soul? Kneeling on a cushion, she clasped her hands and meditated for a moment to gather up and concentrate the strength to speak from some source derived from Heaven. There was something unspeakably awful in that silent pause. No one dared to look at his neighbor. All eyes were fixed on the ground. Yet when Véronique looked up, she met the public prosecutor's glance, and the expression of that white face sent the color to her own.

"I should not have died in peace," Véronique began, in a voice unlike her natural tone, "if I had left behind the false impression which each one of you who hears me speak has possibly formed of me. In me you see a great sinner, who beseeches your prayers, and seeks to merit pardon by

the public confession of her sin. So deeply has she sinned, so fatal were the consequences of her guilt, that it may be that no repentance will redeem it. And yet the greater my humiliation on earth, the less, doubtless, have I to dread from God's anger in the heavenly kingdom whither I fain would go.

"It is nearly twenty years since my father, who had such great belief in me, recommended a son of this parish to my care; he had seen in him a wish to live rightly, aptitude, and an excellent disposition. This young man was the unhappy Jean-François Tascheron, who thenceforward attached himself to me as his benefactress. How was it that my affection for him became a guilty one? That explanation need not, I think, be required of me. Yet perhaps it might be thought that the purest possible motives were imperceptibly transformed by unheard-of self-sacrifice, by human frailty, by a host of causes which might seem to be extenuations of my guilt. But am I the less guilty because our noblest affections were my accomplices? I would rather admit, in spite of the barriers raised by the delicacy natural to our sex between me and the young man whom my father intrusted to me, that I, who by my education and social position might regard myself as his protégé's superior, listened, in an evil hour, to the voice of the Tempter. I soon found that my maternal position brought me into contact with him so close that I could not but be sensible of his mute and delicate admiration. He was the first and only creature to appreciate me at my just value. Perhaps, too, I myself was led astray by unworthy considerations. I thought that I could trust to the discretion of a young man who owed everything to me, whom chance had placed so far below me, albeit by birth we were equals. In fact, I found a cloak to screen my conduct in my name for charity and good deeds. Alas! (and this is one of my worst sins) I hid my passion in the shadow of the altar. I made everything conduce to the miserable triumph of a mad passion, the most irreproachable actions, my love for my mother, acts of a devotion that was very real and sin-

cere and through so many errors—all these things were so many links in a chain that bound me. My poor mother, whom I love so much, who hears me even now, was unwittingly and for a long while my accomplice. When her eyes were opened, I was too deeply committed to my dangerous way, and she found strength to keep my secret in the depths of her mother's heart. Silence in her has thus become the loftiest of virtues. Love for her daughter overcame the love of God. Ah! now I solemnly relieve her of the load of secrecy which she has carried. She shall end her days with no lie in her eyes and brow. May her motherhood absolve her, may her noble and sacred old age, crowned with virtues, shine forth in all its radiance, now that the link which bound her indirectly to touch such infamy is severed—"

Here Véronique's sobs interrupted her words; Aline made her inhale salts.

"Only one other has hitherto been in this secret, the faithful servant who does me this last service; she has, at least, feigned not to know what she must have known, but she has been in the secret of the austerities by which I have broken this weak flesh. So I ask pardon of the world for having lived a lie, drawn into that lie by the remorseless logic of the world.

"Jean-François Tascheron is not as guilty as men may have thought him. Oh, all you who hear me! I beg of you to remember how young he was, and that his frenzy was caused at least as much by the remorse which seized on *me*, as by the spell of an involuntary attraction. And more, far more, do not forget that it was a sense of honor, if mistaken sense of honor, which caused the greatest disaster of all. Neither of us could endure that life of continual deceits. He turned from them to my own greatness, and, unhappy that he was, sought to make our fatal love as little of a humiliation as might be to me. So I was the cause of his crime. Driven by necessity, the unhappy man, hitherto only guilty of too great a love for his idol, chose of all evil actions the one most irreparable. I knew nothing

of it until the very moment when the deed was done. Even as it was being carried out, God overturned the whole fabric of crooked designs. I heard cries that ring even yet in my ears, and went into the house again. I knew that it was a struggle for life and death, and that I, the object of this mad endeavor, was powerless to interfere. For Tascheron was mad; I bear witness that he was mad! . . ."

Here Véronique looked at the public prosecutor, and a deep audible sigh came from Denise.

"He lost his head when he saw his happiness (so he believed it to be) destroyed by unforeseen circumstances. Love led him astray, then fate dragged him from a misdemeanor to a crime, and from a crime to a double murder. At any rate, when he left my mother's house he was an innocent man; when he returned, he was a murderer. I, and I only in the world, knew that the crime was not premeditated, nor accompanied by the aggravating circumstances which brought the sentence of death on him. A hundred times I determined to give myself up to save him, and a hundred times a terrible but necessary heroism outweighed all other considerations, and the words died on my lips. Surely my presence a few steps away must have contributed to give him the hateful, base, cowardly courage of a murderer. If he had been alone, he would have fled. . . . It was I who had formed his nature, who had given him loftier thoughts and a greater heart; I knew him; he was incapable of anything cowardly or base. Do justice to the innocent hand, do justice to him! God in His mercy lets him sleep in the grave that you, guessing, doubtless, the real truth, have watered with your tears! Punish and curse the guilty thing here before you!—When once the deed was done, I was horror-struck; I did all that I could to hide it. My father had left a charge to me, a childless woman; I was to bring one child of God's family to God, and I brought him to the scaffold. . . . Oh, heap all your reproaches upon me! The hour has come!"

Her eyes glittered with fierce pride as she spoke. The

Archbishop, standing behind her, with his pastoral cross held out above her head, no longer maintained his impassive attitude; he covered his eyes with his right hand. A smothered sound like a dying groan broke the silence, and two men—Gérard and Roubaud—caught Denise Tascheron in their arms. She had swooned away. The fire died down in Véronique's eyes; she looked troubled, but the martyr's serenity soon returned to her face.

"I deserve no praise, no blessings for my conduct here, as you know now," she said. "In the sight of Heaven I have led a life full of sharp penance, hidden from all other eyes, and Heaven will value it at its just worth. My outward life has been a vast reparation of the evil that I have wrought; I have engraved my repentance in characters ineffaceable upon this wide land, a record that will last forever. It is written everywhere in the fields grown green, in the growing township, in the mountain streams turned from their courses into the plain, once wild and barren, now fertile and productive. Not a tree shall be felled here for a century but the peasants will tell the tale of the remorse to which they owe its shade. In these ways the repentant spirit which should have inspired a long and useful life will still make its influence felt among you for a long time to come. All that you should have owed to *his* talents and a fortune honorably acquired has been done for you by the executrix of his repentance, by her who caused his crime. All the wrong done socially has been repaired; I have taken upon myself the work of a life cut short in its flower, the life intrusted to my guidance, the life for which I must shortly give an account—"

Here once more the burning eyes were quenched in tears. She paused.

"There is one among those present," she continued, "whom I have hated with a hate which I thought must be eternal, simply because he did no more than his duty. He was the first instrument of my punishment. I was too close to the deed, my feet were dipped too deep in blood, I

was bound to hate justice. I knew that there was a trace of evil passion in my heart so long as that spark of anger should trouble it; I have had nothing to forgive, I have simply purged the corner where the Evil One lurked. Whatever the victory cost, it is complete."

The public prosecutor turned a tear-stained face to Véronique. It was as if man's justice was remorseful in him. Véronique, turning her face away to continue her story, met the eyes of an old friend; Grossetete, bathed in tears, stretched out his hands entreatingly toward her. "It is enough!" he seemed to say. The heroic woman heard such a chorus of sobs about her, received so much sympathy, that she broke down; the balm of the general forgiveness was too much, weakness overcame her. Seeing that the sources of her daughter's strength were exhausted, the old mother seemed to find in herself the vigor of a young woman; she held out her arms to carry Véronique.

"Christians," said the Archbishop, "you have heard the penitent's confession; it confirms the decree of man's justice; it may lay all scruples and anxiety on that score to rest. In this confession you should find new reasons for uniting your prayers to those of the Church, which offers to God the holy sacrifice of the mass to implore His mercy for the sinner after so grand a repentance."

The office was finished. Véronique followed all that was said with an expression of such inward peace that she no longer seemed to be the same woman. Her face wore a look of frank innocence, such as it might have worn in the days when, a pure and ingenuous girl, she dwelt under her father's roof. Her brows grew white in the dawn of eternity, her face glowed golden in the light of Heaven. Doubtless she caught something of its mystic harmonies; and in her longing to be made one with God on earth for the last time, she exerted all her powers of vitality to live. M. Bonnet came to the bedside and gave her absolution; the Archbishop anointed her with the holy oil, with a fatherly tenderness that revealed to those who stood about how dear

he held this sheep that had been lost and was found. With that holy anointing the eyes that had wrought such mischief on earth were closed to the things of earth, the seal of the Church was set on those too eloquent lips, and the ears that had listened to the inspirations of evil were closed forever. All the senses, mortified by penitence, were thus sanctified; the spirit of evil could have no power over this soul.

Never had all the grandeur and deep meaning of a sacrament been apprehended more thoroughly than by those who saw the Church's care thus justified by the dying woman's confession. After that preparation, Véronique received the Body of Christ with a look of hope and joy that melted the icy barrier of unbelief at which the curé had so often knocked in vain. Roubaud, confounded, became a Catholic from that moment.

Awful as the scene was, it was no less touching; and in its solemnity, as of the culminating point of a drama, it might have given some painter the subject of a masterpiece. When the mournful episode was over, and the words of the Gospel of St. John fell on the ears of the dying woman, she beckoned to her mother to bring Francis back again. (The tutor had taken the boy out of the room.) When Francis knelt on the step by the bedside, the mother whose sins had been forgiven felt free to lay her hands in blessing on his head, and so she drew her last breath, La Sauviat standing at the post she had filled for twenty years, faithful to the end. It was she, a heroine after her manner, who closed the eyes of the daughter who had suffered so much, and laid a kiss on them.

Then all the priests and assistants came round the bed, and intoned the dread chant "De profundis" by the light of the flaming torches; and from those sounds the people of the whole countryside kneeling without, together with the friends and all the servants praying in the hall, knew that the mother of the canton had passed away. Groans and sobs mingled with the chanting. The noble woman's confession had not passed beyond the threshold of the drawing-room; it had reached none but friendly ears.

When the peasants came from Montégnac, and all the district round about came in, each with a green spray, to bid their benefactress a supreme farewell mingled with tears and prayers, they saw a representative of man's justice, bowed down with anguish, holding the cold hand of the woman to whom all unwittingly he had meted out such a cruel but just punishment.

Two days later, and the public prosecutor, with Grossetete, the Archbishop, and the mayor, bore the pall when Mme. Graslin was carried to her last resting-place. Amid deep silence they laid her in the grave; no one uttered a word, for no one had the heart to speak, and all eyes were full of tears.

"She is a saint!" Everywhere the words were repeated along the roads which she had made, in the canton which owed its prosperity to her. It was as if the words were sown abroad across her fields to quicken the life in them. It struck nobody as a strange thing that Mme. Graslin should be buried beside Jean-François Tascheron. She had not asked this; but a trace of pitying tenderness in the old mother prompted her to bid the sacristan put those together whom earth had separated by a violent death, whom one repentance should unite in Purgatory.

Mme. Graslin's will fulfilled all expectations. She founded scholarships in the school at Limoges, and beds in the hospital, intended for the working classes only. A considerable sum (three hundred thousand francs in a period of six years) was left to purchase that part of the village called "Tascherons'," and for building an almshouse there. It was to serve as an asylum for the sick and aged poor of the district, a lying-in hospital for destitute women, and a home for foundling children, and was to be known by the name of Tascheron's Almshouse. Véronique directed that it was to be placed in the charge of the Franciscan Sisters, and fixed the salary of the head physician and house-surgeon at four thousand francs. Mme. Graslin begged Roubaud to be the first head physician, and to superintend the

execution of the sanitary arrangements and plans to be made by the architect, M. Gérard. She also endowed the commune of Montégnac with sufficient land to pay the taxes. A certain fund was put in the hands of the Church, to be used as determined in some exceptional cases; for the Church was to be the guardian of the young; and if any of the children in Montégnac should show a special aptitude for art or science or industrial pursuits, the far-sighted benevolence of the testatrix provided thus for their encouragement.

The tidings of her death were received as the news of a calamity to the whole country, and no word that reflected on her memory went with it. This silence was the homage paid to her virtues by a devoutly Catholic and hard-working population, which is about to repeat the miracles of the *Lettres édifiantes* in this corner of France.

Gérard, appointed Francis Graslin's guardian, was required by the terms of the will to live at the chateau, and thither he went; but not until three months after Véronique's death did he marry Denise Tascheron, in whom Francis found, as it were, a second mother.

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